

Study Commission mandated
by L'Arche Internationale

**Control and Abuse
Investigation on Thomas Philippe,
Jean Vanier and L'Arche
(1950-2019)**

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“I will leave tomorrow for Italy and Rome. I entrust this short stay to your prayers so that everything may be as the Good Jesus desires. I would prefer that you do not speak about my stay in Italy - to anyone - to avoid indiscretions and prohibitions. [...] Silence hides many things and even safeguards the work of God ...¹ »

“What I want is the truth about all this. If the truth is there, then we can talk about forgiveness and reconciliation, not before this. Believe me, I do not want to destroy L’Arche or anybody in it, I am in the boat myself, so every aggression would aggress me too. All I want is the real truth. And it has not yet been told. I am sure. May God’s light come upon each of us and guide our paths! ²”

1. Letter from Jean Vanier to his parents, December 10th, 1961, APJV. Jean Vanier then travels to Rome to secretly meet Thomas Philippe.

2. Letter from Ulrike Dürrbeck to Jean Vanier, October 19th, 2015, APJV.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ADPF [or according to the APDF sources]: Archives dominicaines de la Province de France [Archives of the Dominican Province of France], Paris

AGOP: General archives of the preaching order, Rome

ACDF: Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Rome

APJV: Personal archives of Jean Vanier (Trosly-Breuil)

AAT: Archives of L'Arche in Trosly

AAI: Archives of L'Arche International

ACN: Archives of the Carmelites in Nogent-sur-Marne

ACC: Archives Carmelites in Caen

ACJV; Archives du Centre Jean Vanier, (London, Ontario)

AALM: Archives of L'Arche La Merci

BAC: Bibliothèque et Archives Canada (Ottawa)

NFA: "Not for all"

Disclaimer

"This report has been translated from French into English by 6 different translators and under significant time constraints both for translation and proofreading. This may lead to some lack of consistency. May all translators and proofreaders be thanked for their commitment and for the quality of their work. The original French text, for which the authors assume full responsibility, is the sole authoritative version of this report."

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the abuses they had suffered.

To Father Paul Philippe, Dominican,
commissioner of the Holy Office,
who was the first, with clear determination,
to establish the foundations of this story.

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General introduction

The origins of the Study Commission

This report is the result of the survey conducted by the Study Commission commissioned by L'Arche Internationale in the fall of 2020 to “shed light on the history of the founding of L'Arche and its motivations, as well as to identify the cultural and institutional dynamics within L'Arche that may have facilitated these situations of abuse”¹.

Why such an investigation, of such magnitude? In the history of L'Arche, punctually and discreetly, women have tried on various occasions to report the abuse they have suffered from one or other of the founders, Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier. In 2014, following the receipt of testimonies from members of L'Arche denouncing abuses committed on their persons by T. Philippe, Archbishop d'Ornellas, appointed to accompany L'Arche Internationale, initiated a canonical investigation according to canon No. 1717. He mandated the Dominican Paul-Dominique Marcovits to “listen to people as much as possible, in order not only to know the facts in their exactness, but also to show these people that the Church understands their suffering and their words.”². This three-month investigation resulted in the submission of a report in 2015, in which the Dominican concluded that the

1. Presentation document of the study commission on the L'Arche Internationale website (link at the bottom of the page 10)

2. Letter from Archbishop d'Ornellas to Father Marcovits, November 18th, 2014, AAR.

allegations were well-founded.¹ It triggered, among other things, the testimony written *a posteriori* by a Canadian woman, Judy Farquharson, “Myriam” under her anonymous name, declaring that she had been abused not only by T. Philippe but also by J. Vanier. The existence of this testimony was already known by a person in charge, at L’Arche, at least since the middle of the year 2013. The letter of J. Farquharson, in May 2016, echoes another testimony received in December 2014, in the utmost confidentiality, by a senior official of L’Arche Internationale. Testifying to her personal experience of abuse by the founder, a woman wishing to remain anonymous invited vigilance, while formally refusing that her existence and her story be shared. The senior officials of L’Arche Internationale then urged the founder to speak out, at the end of his life, on the accusations brought against T. Philippe and against himself – without conclusive success.

In March 2019, the senior officials of L’Arche received a new anonymous testimony, which this time constituted a sufficient point of support to launch an investigation. In May, they commissioned GCPS Consulting, an independent British organization specializing in the investigation of sexual abuse facts, to “review the allegations concerning the founder Jean Vanier” and “audit” the way in which L’Arche International dealt with “reports of abuse, past or recent”². At the same time, they entrust Antoine Mourges, an historian, with the additional task of reporting, through a first work of historical investigation, on the role of J. Vanier in the group of initiates who surrounded T. Philippe before L’Arche. GCPS and Antoine Mourges submitted their two reports in February 2020³. The main conclusions were made public in February 2020 by L’Arche and by the press, a few months after the death of J. Vanier.

1. The canonical inquiry, ordered on 18 November, 2014 by Bishop Pierre d’Ornellas, is entrusted to Br. Paul-Dominique Marcovits, whose report is dated February 18th, 2015 (19 pages, with numerous documents). The investigation, with all its documents, has been sent to the L’Arche Study Commission.

2. Specifications, GCPS, May 3rd, 2019, p. 2-5. AAI

3. Antoine Mourges, *The involvement of Jean Vanier in the group of “little ones” of Fr. Thomas Philippe (o.p.), 1950-1970. First historical approach*, February 2020, 81 p., restricted distribution; Global Child Protection Services Consulting [GCPS], Final Report on an internal review into historical safeguarding concerns commissioned by L’Arche International, s.l., 2020, 65 p., restricted distribution.

Attesting not only to the admissibility of the coherent and convergent testimonies of six women, but also to J. Vanier’s long-standing knowledge of the facts of abuse involving T. Philippe, these conclusions arouse, both inside L’Arche and outside, a real shock and a lot of emotions. All over the world, members of L’Arche are expressing their incomprehension and their feeling of betrayal. In Canada, a country where the Vanier family is revered, J. Vanier schools are renamed. In the Catholic world, it is amazement. The media environment acts as a sounding board: the conclusions of the two reports seem to painfully echo not only the denunciations made by the global #metoo movement, but also the investigations into sexual crimes, particularly in Catholic institutions¹. In this context, for the leaders of L’Arche:

These revelations [...] require L’Arche to have a rigorous and profound understanding allowing it to draw all possible conclusions regarding its history, its culture and its functioning of yesterday and today².

For this reason, in the fall of 2020, they choose to set up a Study Commission made up of six researchers from different disciplines: history, sociology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, theology.

The Study Commission is independent and has remained free in its choice of method, sources, work schedules, interpretations and conclusions. After two years of work, it wishes to make public, under its own responsibility, all of its work, so that the culture of secrecy, carefully maintained for decades, finally ceases as much as possible and so that the pieces of this story – hardly believable on certain points – are finally exposed and accessible to all.

1. Since 2000, investigations relating to sexual crimes in many countries where L’Arche is established follow one another, some relating to pedophile crimes (Ireland, 2000; Australia, 2017), others to sexual crimes in religious institutions (United States, 2010), Catholics in particular (Belgium, 2011; Netherlands, 2015; France, 2021).

2. L’Arche Study Commission, “Study Commission and Scientific Committee. Objectives and operation”, November 27th, 2020.
https://intranet.larche.org/documents/10181/2994508/Study-commission_scientific-committee_AI_final_EN.pdf/95e55b3e-f431-4b79-810f-f74bc0fb3b31

The Aims

Presenting the ambitions of the study commission means immediately eliminating two possible misunderstandings. The Study Commission is not a *post-mortem* legal body: its members are neither judges, nor prosecutors, nor defence lawyers, but investigators in the etymological sense of the term, since the *historian*, and by extension the scientist, is primarily an *investigator*. The mandate of the Commission is – as much as possible – to establish historical facts and make intelligible a complex collective history. By publicly reporting the results of its investigation, the intention of the Commission, like that of L’Arche Internationale, is to make available to all solid elements, rigorously sourced and cross-checked, capable of offering an enlightened understanding of the alleged facts. and their contexts of deployment, as well as to nourish the reflection of those who would like to participate in the fight against the acts of control and abuse in L’Arche. This point invites us to dismiss a second possible misunderstanding: the Commission is not an *expert body*, in the precise sense that, as *researchers* and *investigators*, its members do not intend to offer assistance in operational decision-making by formulating advice or recommendations.

The Study Commission would like to say that it is aware that it is not meeting everyone’s expectations. It was not possible for it, for example, to retrace the global history of L’Arche, with its darkness and its light. Because that was not its mandate, the Commission also did not investigate other situations of control or abuse that may have existed in the environment of L’Arche and that were not related to J. Vanier or to T. Philippe. Nor was it conceivable for the Commission to paint a portrait of J. Vanier as a “sinner” “saved” by the work he founded and by the acts of kindness he performed. Has he been purified by the work of L’Arche? How should L’Arche position itself in relation to its founders? The question of forgiveness and mercy, the balance of “sins” and “merits”, does not fall within the Commission’s competence. If uncertainties persist on certain points – they are assumed throughout the report – the Commission affirms that nothing has been put forward without careful verification and comparison of sources and testimonies.

The aims of the Commission, as defined in the framework letter dated November 27th, 2020, are as follows:

In the light of the updated facts about Thomas Philippe and then Jean Vanier, it is essentially a question of answering the following questions: How to shed light on the history of our foundation and its motivations? What were the cultural and institutional dynamics at work within L’Arche? To what extent may the situations of abuse involving Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier have had a systemic dimension?

The facts and analyses produced by the Commission will relate to the history and founding myth – to the role and place of the founder – to the values and spirituality implemented – to the discourse and vocabulary used. They will also concern operating methods: governance, the exercise of authority, conflict management, recruitment methods, support for people received and assistants. [...]

Two questions will form the Commission’s main axes of focus:

In the light of our new knowledge, how to explain the itinerary of J. Vanier?

For many, J. Vanier cemented the identity of L’Arche, of which he was the founder. What were the modes of relations between J. Vanier and the members of L’Arche? How did this operate and what imprint did this leave on its identity, its culture and its organization today?

If the first axis is mainly centered on Jean Vanier and involves getting to know him better, it is essential to understand the context in which he lived and acted: his personal itinerary and history, his psychology, his intellectual construction and his philosophical sources, his relationship to others, his link to Father Thomas and his degree of belief in the deviant mysticism to which he was initiated, (“mysticism” which should be better understood and defined with the help of the Dominicans), his relationship to the Church, to authority and confrontation, to sexuality and the body, the place of the community environment in this drift and the lack of regulation from which it seems to have “benefited”, etc.

The analysis of his writings and his conferences is particularly part of the work to be conducted in this area.

The second axis involves more to analyse the relations between Jean Vanier, the charismatic founder, great spiritual figure, and his environment: how was constructed the founding story, the spirituality of L’Arche (the question of what this spirituality is will be approached), the representations and motivations of the assistants and people welcomed at different stages, the rules and the rites, the invisible links, the part of the man and the part of his speech, his inscription in a social and religious environment...

The Commission has attempted to answer all of these questions. In concrete terms, it was also a question of shedding light on the double reproach formulated against J. Vanier. The first grievance concerns his “complicity” with T. Philippe: J. Vanier is accused of having defended, against the truth, the person of T. Philippe, his reputation, his works, his mode of spiritual direction, his sexual abuses. He protected those misdeeds, in the sense that he “covered” them; J. Vanier knew, lied on these specific points for complex reasons that we are analysing, and allowed within L’Arche the emergence of the conditions of possibility and perpetuation of abuse. The second grievance further damages the portrait of J. Vanier. He is accused of having reproduced the pattern of spiritual influence and sexual abuse by T. Philippe, with differences to be highlighted.

These grievances are not completely new: as early as 1956, the Holy Office considered that J. Vanier, “n°1 spiritual son and continuator of the Father”, with a “total absence of judgment”, had become the “most fanatical disciple” of T. Philippe. In fact, since 1950, J. Vanier had joined L’Eau Vive, an institution both religious and para-university which had been founded as a “school of life” by Father T. Philippe, o. p., in 1945. From 1952, J. Vanier became the manager. The formulas of the Holy Office, which date from April-August 1956, are frequently used in Roman analyses until the 1970s. They open up several questions: Was J. Vanier himself under the influence of T. Philippe? For what reasons? In April 1956, the Holy Office demanded from J. Vanier, if he persevered in his priestly desire, “serious proof of detoxification”. These grievances are heavy, complex, difficult to hear for a large number of people who knew and loved J. Vanier. It is up to the Study Commission to assess them with all the necessary precision and rigor.

The investigation of the L’Arche Study Commission is, in fact, only one more step on a long road to awareness and on the fight against the facts of control and abuse which go far beyond the only historical and institutional framework of the international organization L’Arche, founded in 1964. Moreover, if surveys were conducted well before that of the Study Commission of L’Arche, others are conducted at the same time. The Dominicans of the Province of France and the brothers of Saint-Jean have also appointed commissions. The first concerns T. Philippe and the monitoring of his situation by the institutions to which he belonged. The second

deals with Marie-Dominique Philippe, founder of the Saint-Jean family. The dialogues between the commissions were fruitful: exchange of documents, joint reflections on this or that an aspect of the subjects treated, complements on the subjects treated. Because of the number of victims, the complexity of the questions raised, the scandal, it was necessary to distinguish the men, but in substance, the problem is common and there are large areas of overlap between the three commissions. The calendar of the Dominican Commission and that of the Brothers of Saint-Jean are close to that of the L’Arche Commission; the different analyses will shed light on each other.

The work initiated by these three organizations fed into that of the “Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church” (CIASE), mandated in November 2018 by the Conference of French Bishops (CEF) and by the Conference of Religious in France (CORREF)¹. The main report of the CIASE, made public on October 5, 2021, included elements of analysis from the study by Antoine Mourges submitted to L’Arche in February 2020² and highlighted :

the case, largely public, and particular – because devastating and sadly emblematic – of the theological deviation of Thomas Philippe, then of his brother Marie-Dominique, founder of the new community of the Brothers of Saint-Jean, who influenced many places of the Church (several Carmelite new communities) and also touched the founder of L’Arche, J. Vanier. With them, the nuptials between Christ and his Church are deviated into a mystical union between Jesus and Mary, justifying many sexual practices not freely consented to.³

1. Philippe Portier (dir.), *Sexual violence in the Catholic Church in France (1950-2020). Report of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes research group for CIASE*, October 2021, p. 38: “The most successful historical investigation concerned L’Arche. Antoine Mourges exploited the archives of the Dominican Province of France; the testimonies of the victims were collected. He was able to offer a historical analysis of the group of Fr. Thomas Philippe, o.p. This work [February 2020] served as the basis for L’Arche communication. At the request of the Provincial of the Province of France of the Order of Preachers [the Dominicans], a commission of historians [...] began in 2019 an investigation of Fr. Thomas Philippe. The CIASE historical research team worked with it to share information and thoughts. For their part, the Saint-Jean Community and the Foyers de Charité relied essentially on the testimonies published and received. The historical research team [of CIASE] had access to the work of these commissions.”

2. Philippe Portier (dir.), *op. cit.*, 2021, p. 36, 273-276.

3. Jean-Marc Sauv  (dir.), *Les violences sexuelles dans l’ glise catholique (1950-2020). Rapport de la CIASE*, October 2021, 536 p., p. 329, paragraph 912.

This formulation does not fully reflect the complexity of the situation: the three men, T. Philippe, M.-D. Philippe and J. Vanier, were certainly close, but are to be distinguished; for J. Vanier in particular, the cases of “sexual practices not freely consented to” of which the Commission has been informed are based on relations of influence that are sometimes subtle, in the chiaroscuro of the consciences of people who claim to be certain “victims” or “survivors” of abusive relationships, or, for some “partners” of transgressive relationships. The socio-historical survey of the CIASE, under the direction of Philippe Portier, taking up certain elements established by the survey of Antoine Mourges of February 2020, attempted to identify the complexity of the difficulties¹.

Finally, we add that the work of the Study Commission was able to take advantage of the growing number of works relating to sexual abuse in general, in Catholic institutions in particular, but also at L’Arche: testimonies of victims,² observations from the inside³, works of analysis and synthesis⁴, reports of the various commissions, with the lively and methodologically useful debates they generated⁵.

Given the existence of this documentation, the achievements of previous surveys and the scope of the various commissions that we have just mentioned, the objectives of the L’Arche Study Commission were necessarily precise. The chronological framework of the study covers more than 90 years, from the birth of J. Vanier in Geneva in September 1928 to his death in Paris in May 2019. If the view of historians, sociologists, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and theologians concentrates on

1. Philippe Portier (dir.), *op. cit.*, 2021, p. 273-274. The footnote of this volume explicitly refers to the work of Antoine Mourges of February 2020.

2. Sophie Ducrey, *Étouffée [Smothered]. An Account of spiritual and sexual abuse*, Paris, Tallandier, 2019; Michèle-France Pesneau, *The influence. Twenty years of spiritual and sexual influence. A path of liberation*, Villeurbanne, Golias, 2020.

3. Jean de La Selle, *L’Arche. Between shadows and lights. A story of the foundation’s community adventure*, Paris, Salvator, 2021.

4. Anne Philibert, *Des prêtres et des scandales*, Paris, Cerf, 2019. Véronique Margron, *Un moment de vérité*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2019. Claude Langlois, *On savait, mais quoi? La pédophilie dans l’Église catholique*, Paris, Seuil, 2019. Céline Béraud, *Le catholicisme français à l’épreuve des scandales sexuels*, Paris, Seuil, 2021. Céline Hoyeau, *La trahison des pères. Emprise et abus des fondateurs de communautés nouvelles*, Paris, Bayard, 2021.

5. Read in particular Philippe Portier (dir.), *op. cit.*

J. Vanier and L’Arche, the analysis obliges them to pay special attention to the relationship of J. Vanier to T. Philippe, to the group of “little ones,” to the dissemination of shared beliefs. It must be emphasized that without this, no understanding of the acts of control and sexual abuse committed by J. Vanier is possible.

The method and the work

In fact, the study was deployed in a triple direction: collecting, documenting, understanding. It is based on a massive material, partly unpublished, and on a multidisciplinary approach.

It was necessary to begin by inventorying the scattered archives of this story. At the end of the volume, you will find the list of all the heritage institutions visited and the description of the materials mobilized, in France, Rome and Canada. The documentation found was ample and eloquent, with as markers a series of investigations that had taken place in the past and which were communicated to the L’Arche Study Commission. In addition to the recent inquiries cited at the beginning of this introduction, the inquiry carried out by the Holy Office in 1952 was of capital importance. Conducted under the meticulous guidance of Fr Paul Philippe¹, Commissioner of the Holy Office and future cardinal, who followed the case of T. Philippe and the situation of J. Vanier for three decades, this investigation accumulated testimonies, doctors’ reports, memoirs, notes and led to a set of canonical sanctions in 1956 Revivals in the late 1970s², as we will see in the report, during this period they will

1. Without any family ties to T. Philippe and M.-D. Philippe.

2. The fund relating to T. Philippe, opened under protocol number “214” in 1952, contains all the archives of the former Holy Office concerning T. Philippe, from the trial “for false mysticism” (1952-1956) until 1981. The file includes a total of 311 archival items. This fonds gathers the documents relating to J. Vanier, who has no archival fonds of his own opened in his name. In May 2021, 62 documents concerning J. Vanier were disclosed, in whole or in part, to the Study Commission. The commission had access in December 2021 to a very precise archival report from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This 68-page document (“Relazione d’Archivio”) covers the whole of file 214/1952, including extensive quotations from numerous documents in the file. We find some originals and some copies of the documents of the Holy Office, communicated or not by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to the AGOP, to the ADPF, in the personal archives of J. Vanier, and in certain diocesan archives. In the remainder of the report, the file reference (214/1952) will no longer be recalled.

have direct consequences on the itinerary of J. Vanier, but also, indirectly, on that of L'Arche.

The Study Commission would like to point out that it has received the support of all the archival institutions contacted¹. From Rome to Paris, from Quebec to Ottawa and London (Ontario), from Meaux to Versailles, from Rennes to Beauvais, from the Dominicans to the Carmelites, from the “little sisters of the Blessed Virgin” to the Brothers of Saint-Jean, all the archives of L'Arche, of the Holy Office, of the Vanier family, of the dioceses, of the religious congregations concerned, etc., which are directly related to J. Vanier, have been made accessible to the Study Commission and have made it possible to base the historical investigation on a considerable documentary base.

However, the Commission may be permitted to formulate a few reservations on certain corners that have remained obscure because of history or despite the requests made. Many of the archives linked to L'Eau Vive were destroyed in June-July 1956, when the institution closed. The main elements for this period can, however, be established by the Dominican archives, in Rome and Paris, and by those of the Holy Office. Like T. Philippe, J. Vanier also kept relatively few elements of his personal correspondence. However, he kept his diaries from 1965 until his death, as well as a few work files and the so-called “NFA” [*Not for all*] papers, which include several hundred letters received from T. Philippe and from women who played an important role in these events (notably Jacqueline d'Halluin and Anne de Rosanbo). In the archives of his parents, deposited at Library and Archives of Canada (Ottawa), J. Vanier had also recovered the correspondence he had sent to his parents and which the Commission found. The various archive collections consulted contain around 1,400 letters, written or received by J. Vanier, which can be described as “intimate” letters. That said, the

1. We highlight only one exception: access to the archives of Saint Michael's University College (in particular the archives of the community of L'Arche, Daybreak) has not been possible, despite repeated attempts for 18 months. Only the support and involvement of Joe Egan allowed the Commission to have access to a few rare documents. As a result, the commission was regretfully compelled to modify one of its original research objectives: the comparison between the institutionalization of formal authority in the community of Trosly-Breuil, France, and that of Daybreak, Canada.

Study Commission did not expect consultation of the archives, however abundant they might be, to be able to answer all the questions. Archives always contain only what has been entrusted to them and has survived. Even methodically stripped, they pose questions that can only be answered by the actors or close witnesses.

The Commission's investigation is then based on a corpus of interviews. In a concerted manner, four members of the commission conducted, each according to the methodological rules specific to his or her discipline (sociology, history, psychiatry, psychoanalysis), 119 interviews with 89 people. These interviews represent more than 200 hours of listening. Several groups were targeted: people declaring to have been victims or survivors of an abusive relationships, or partners of a transgressive relationship with the founder of L'Arche, with T. Philippe or with other members of L'Arche who appear to have been initiated into the group's “mystical-sexual” beliefs and practices; witnesses to the history of L'Arche, particularly in the community to which J. Vanier and T. Philippe belong (Trosly-Breuil); close friends of J. Vanier; members of L'Arche who have held positions of responsibility at different levels (community, country, zones or regions, federation) and at different times. Conducted in English or French, face-to-face (in France and Canada), remotely (telephone or videoconference) and sometimes in writing, the interviews, their transcriptions and their use followed a precise methodological and ethical protocol, presented at the end of the report.

In general, the people interviewed testified to a sincere desire for truth and trusted the work of the Commission, sometimes agreeing to share painful facts or decisions – whether or not they were linked to the configurations of influence and abuse that the Commission was trying to understand. We emphasize that the commission received spontaneous testimonies from several people wishing to contribute to this work of understanding. For this trust, the Commission is deeply grateful. In addition, 15 people contacted by the Commission refused to meet it – either explicitly, or in a roundabout way, or by not giving an answer. For the refusals explicitly justified to the Commission, the reasons invoked were age, loyalty or the recognition maintained intact towards J. Vanier and T. Philippe for “the graces received and shared”, or again – in the case of persons no doubt caught in abusive or transgressive relationships

– because “wanting to remain in peace¹, we didn’t want to talk about it anymore. The Commission regrets the absence of these testimonies, which would have provided an opportunity to refine the analyses. But the work of the Commission is also to grasp the mechanisms for silencing witnesses. A victim wrote in this sense: ‘I spoke about that [it is about an abuse], not long ago, to Jean Vanier and he also thought that it was good to bury that and to give thanks for Father Thomas’². “The law of silence, imposed by Thomas Philippe, was a prison for the victims,” observed for his part the Dominican religious who investigated the subject in 2014-2015.³ The interview corpus was particularly mobilized in parts 3 to 6 of the report (sociology, history, psychiatry, psychoanalysis).

The practical theological *survey*, for its part, was based on a singular material: 15 works by J. Vanier. Given the number of publications of the latter, the construction of this corpus was motivated by a double intention of selecting works published and widely read (within L’Arche as well as outside), but also published at different periods, so as to cover the entire period of J. Vanier’s activity. The meticulous study of this corpus aims at characterizing J. Vanier’s spirituality, by seeking not only if certain aspects could have favoured an abusive positioning vis-à-vis certain women, but also if the filiation with the spirituality of T. Philippe—in particular his “mystical-sexual” beliefs—was able to emerge in places (Part 7).

Faced with this massive, plural and partly unprecedented material, the Commission has carried out a resolutely multidisciplinary work, following the perspective according to which “each discipline develops its questions and its ambitions in relation to other disciplines”. The differences, even the antagonism between the disciplines—when it takes the form of an intellectual confrontation can turn out to be particularly fruitful⁴.

1. Refusal email from an anonymous person, addressed to Antoine Mourges, 21 September 2021.

2. “Marcovits Report, document dated May 23rd, 2014.

3. “Marcovits Report,” p. 19, February 18th, 2015.

4. Anne-Claire Collier, Laura Péaud, Claire Vincent-Mory, “La recherche pluri, inter et trans-disciplinaire en pratique. Introduction”, *EspaceTemps*, No. Special issue, 2018 [URL]: <https://www.espacetemps.net/articles/recherche-pluri-inter-transdisciplinaire-pratique/>; Calafat Guillaume, Lavergne Cécile et Monnet Eric, “*Philosophie et sciences sociales*”, *Tracés*, No.3, 2013, p.11-12; Lemieux Cyril. 2012. “Philosophie et sociologie? Le prix du passage,” *Sociologie*, vol. 3 No. 2, p. 199-209.

In practice, the Commission met every month for two years, allowing each member to share the progress of his or her research and feed on that of their colleagues, maintaining a fruitful dialogue at each stage. While respecting the disciplinary singularities and the nuances of the results of each, crossovers took place, particularly at certain stages of the collection and analysis of the materials, but also at the time of the formulation of the results. In addition, the members improved their methods and their analyses thanks to exchanges with scientists and specialists endowed with complementary knowledge, in particular psychologists¹. The Commission regularly reported on the progress of its questions, its methodological choices, the results of its analyses to a Scientific Committee made up of recognized specialists in the themes addressed by the survey². Alain Cordier played the valuable role of interlocutor and discussant of the work of the Commission, giving its members the benefit of his view and his experience, particularly within the CIASE. Finally, the Commission has benefited from the essential work of coordination, operational support and liaison (with L’Arche, the Scientific Council, external interlocutors, etc.) provided by Erik Pillet, a retired member of L’Arche. In accordance with what had been agreed by the stakeholders, the liaison work also consisted, whenever necessary, in keeping tight the boundary between the Commission and the management of L’Arche Internationale³.

1. The Commission is grateful for the insights, advice and proofreading of: Isabelle Chartier-Siben, Isabelle Lebourgeois, Antoinette Guise, Hubert Borde, Don Augustin Azaïs.

2. Marie Balmay, psychoanalyst; Céline Béraud, sociologist and research director at EHESS; Guillaume Cuchet, historian and professor at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne; Karlijn Demazure, theologian, professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome; Véronique Margron, Dominican sister and provincial prioress of France, professor of moral theology and dean of the Catholic University of the West, president of CORREF; Christian Salenson, theologian, priest of the diocese of Nîmes and director of the Institute of Sciences and Theology of Religions of the Catholic Institute of the Mediterranean in Marseille; Jean-Guilhem Xerri, biologist and psychoanalyst.

3. For more details on the implications of this sealing for the interview campaign and the collection of sensitive material, see the document at the end of the report.

The vocabulary used

The issue of vocabulary is one of those that has been debated at length by the Study Commission. Media, legal, medical and scientific vocabularies collide. Can we historicize the vocabulary used by the victims, by the protagonists, by the witnesses, by the doctors consulted, by the various investigators, etc., to qualify the facts and the people? The historical sources reveal three lexicons mobilized and superimposed, according to a variable geometry, to characterize the behaviour of T. Philippe and J. Vanier.

The first lexicon is that of law, of canon (not state law), since for T. Philippe and J. Vanier the civil or criminal (state) jurisdictions have never been invoked by the victims. We therefore speak, in the sources, of non-respect of canonical rules, of canonical trials, of investigations by the “commissioner” of the Holy Office, and always in a canonical perspective, of culprits, accused, lawyers, judgments, accomplices, crimes, sanctions, penalties, etc. It is necessary to insist on this point, which is sometimes a source of confusion: it is not state law that has been applied in this case, but canon law, with its own procedures. It should also be noted that in the 1950s T. Philippe and J. Vanier themselves willingly resorted to a legal type of argument, both to admit “things” and to propose distinctions that were as subtle as they were uncertain. We thus read in a letter from T. Philippe addressed to the Dominican Master General in June 1952:

I think it is worth specifying, which perhaps I did not tell you explicitly enough, that I never did these things as Director of L’Eau vive, nor even as a priest having jurisdiction over the Church, but only as a private person, not wanting to exert any moral pressure, always leaving absolutely free, not hiding the obscure, strange, exceptional character of these things.¹

The formulas used (“moral pressure,” “always leaving absolutely free”) are the sign of the awareness, since the early 1950s, of the issues that we designate today under the word “grip”. Note in passing that the term is initially reserved for the theological register to designate “the

1. Letter from Thomas Philippe to the Master General of the Order, Fr. Suarez, 12 June, 1952, General Archives of the Order of Preachers [AGOP].

influence of God” or “the influence of the Holy Spirit”¹, before going into the psychological register. These very subtle distinctions between the “director” of L’Eau Vive, the “priest”, and the “private person”, were repeated two months later by J. Vanier, who implicitly implied that the abuses were in fact “interior acts,” *id est* without materiality: “What Fr. Thomas did, he did as a private man. I can say before God that neither by his teaching nor by his outward acts he has ever given cause for criticism².”

The term “influence” is polysemic. It is a concept debated by psychoanalysis and psychology since the 1940s. The human and social sciences seem to be grasping it today, thanks in particular to the development of research on sexual violence. Founded on an asymmetrical relationship, influence is apprehended in this relationship as a process by which a person takes control of the experiences of the social world of another person, in all the dimensions of their existence (spiritual, intellectual, affective, professional, etc.). The confinement is progressive, discreet – and difficult to detect³. This term and its translations in the English language⁴ entered very recently and partially into civil and criminal legislation. Similarly, a similar tension over the use of the word “abuse” has raised discussions within the Commission. Despite its

1. On this specific point, rarely developed in the bibliography to our knowledge, it is important to note the shift from the theological register, the influence then qualifying a mode of relationship between God and the person, towards the psychological register, between two people. In September 1946, in a retreat entitled “The heart of the Blessed Virgin, refuge of our contemplative life”, Marie-Dominique Philippe explained, for example, to nuns: “You have to have an infinitely great docility to the Holy Spirit. In the Wisdom of God, it is one and the same mystery. [...] You just have to follow docilely the influence of the Holy Spirit, whether He makes us a Child, or whether He makes us a Bride. That he completely strips us of our petty judgment, of our personal preferences.” Thomas Philippe, in his pamphlet *La vie cachée de Marie* (1959, 1977, new edition in 1988), also has developments on the union of love with God, which “implies a real influence of all our faculties”, the model being Mary, “always under the influence of the Spirit” and “under the grip of loving passivity” (p. 34-35, edition of 1977).

2. Letter from Jean Vanier to Father. Paul Philippe, August 8th, 1952, AGOP.

3. For a more precise sociological definition see the end of the chapter 12.

4. The French word *emprise* can be defined in different ways in English, depending on the social and legal context, in particular by the words “grip”, ‘hold’, ‘influence’ but also ‘grooming’. For more details on this last term, see chapter 15.

polysemy, its media uses and its heterogeneous civil and criminal legal qualifications depending on the State, the Commission has chosen to use it in its sense of “unjust use of power of a sexual nature causing harm to the person who suffers it”¹. By accounting for the formation of abusive configurations, this multi-voiced relationship shows the links between acts of sexual abuse and other forms of abuse of power.

It would be relevant, in itself, to qualify the entire file from a legal point of view. One will find in the documents quoted many legal analyses, but this line of reading, which is relevant during the lifetime of the persons concerned, was not retained by the Study Commission, for the reasons set out above in this introduction.

The second lexicon used is that of medical vocabulary, which seeks to characterize a pathology and in particular to distinguish between delirium and perversion. Many terms have been used in connection with the disorders from which T. Philippe may have suffered, testifying to the richness, variability and sometimes imprecision of psychiatric vocabulary. In the part of Chapter 18 devoted to this point, several diagnoses or clinical assessments are cited, giving the impression of disorder and contradictions, although it is nevertheless possible to make them more homogeneous than they appear. Examples include the following terms: schizophrenia, dementia praecox, delirium of the mystical-religious type of reforming paranoia, paraphilia. T. Philippe is also described as a “dangerous patient” and his “power of lying” is mentioned. This medical track, whose extreme importance is well understood, should be extended to J. Vanier, for whom it was necessary – as much as possible – to attempt to establish a psychiatric and psychoanalytical profile by cross-checking sources and interviews. This is the subject of several developments in the survey (Parts 5 and 6). The psychoanalytical part is by nature more speculative and is based on rather fragmented material concerning the psychic development of J. Vanier.

The third lexicon is that of the strictly religious vocabulary, which most often characterizes not the facts themselves, but their contexts, their

1. A precise definition of the use of the word by researchers in the humanities and social sciences of the Commission, in this report, is provided by the introduction to the fourth part of the report.

causes, their effects or their interpretations. There is a religious saturation of the sources that we must question and try to put at the right distance. Those close to the case thus invoke in turn the “quietism” of T. Philippe, the “sect” of L’Eau Vive, the “seduction” that T. Philippe exercises, his “heresy”, his “false mysticism”, his “false mysticism”, and the “fanaticism”¹ of the members of the “cult,” etc. T. Philippe, and J. Vanier following him, as we shall see, explains the “imprudences” committed by an “inner inspiration.” It would not be sexual desire, or sexual drive, but a call, an act of faith, even an express request from the Most Blessed Virgin:

I had believed, Fr Thomas Philippe explains, that the Most Blessed Virgin was asking me to do so, like somewhat senseless acts of faith, as we see certain examples of in the Old Testament, and I had thought I had to follow the inner inspiration, remembering the comments of S. Thomas on these texts².

For his justification, T. Philippe evokes, or one evokes for him, the “vision,” the “private revelations” that he would have had the “mystical grace” to receive in Rome in 1938 in front of the fresco of the *Mater Admirabilis*. We wonder about the “control” – or not – of this “vision.” The “mystique” of T. Philippe is based in particular on the affirmation of incestuous sexual relations between Jesus and Mary during their earthly life and continuing in their heavenly life. This religious vocabulary encloses people in a gangue. It will therefore be necessary to try to clear this gangue to establish the facts in their simple reality. The religious sometimes seems to *dress* the sexual in the qualification of the intimate relations that T. Philippe, then J. Vanier in his wake, maintained with women. However, should we, for example, use the terms used in the sources of “erotic-mystic” relations? In this designation, forged in the 1950s, taken up by Paul Ricoeur when he evoked in 1960 “the penumbra of erotic-mystic lyricism”³ and reused even in the report

1. Doc. 264, 16 May, 1975, CDF Archives: “Thomas Philippe was tried and sentenced for serious offenses of a pseudo-mystical nature” (di natura pseudo-mistica). Jean Vanier is called: “il piu fanatico dei discepoli del P. Philippe (the most fanatical of Fr Philippe’s disciples).”

2. Letter from Thomas Philippe to the Master General of the Order, 27 March 1952, AGOP.

3. Paul Ricoeur, “Sexualité. La merveille, l’errance, l’énigme”, *Esprit*, November 1960, included in the third edition of *Histoire et vérité*, Paris, Seuil, 1967.

of the CIASE, the accent falls on the mystical element and somehow places the erotic as a secondary concern, as if the relations, before being sexual, *first* concerned the order of spirituality. Or are they rather, reversing the balance between the two terms, “mystico-erotic”, according to the expression used from the 1960s to qualify the “doctrine” and the “madness” of T. Philippe¹, and referring mysticism to a simple device of verbal self-justification? Or are they, according to another formula, “mystico-sexual”², with the accent which this time would fall on the sexual? Should they be qualified only as “sexual” – which they clearly are – even though, in the act itself for T. Philippe and J. Vanier, the religious perspective of the act comes into play? The Commission observes, in the sources, the plurality of these expressions which are not equivalent and which however all raise the same question: is the religious part of this sexual disorder a cause – and in what senses? – or simply a self-justification for the satisfaction of desires? The question – as we shall see – cannot receive simple answers.

The subject of “the divine games of love” – without any understatement

Finally, at the beginning of this report, it is important to clearly state the outlines of its main subject. What are we talking about exactly? What does T. Philippe mean when, corrupting St John of the Cross³, he evokes the “divine games of love”?

Regarding the charges against T. Philippe, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith qualifies them in 2019 as “serious sexual abuse with adult women, involving the sacrament of penance, and false mysticism to

1. Report of Paul Philippe, February 21st, 1966, AGOP: “si trattava di pazzia mistico-erotica”, “le sue dottrine mistico-erotiche”.

2. “Rapport Marcovits”, document dated May 21st, 2014. The expression is repeated in the report itself, dated February 18th, 2015.

3. On this issue, see for example St John of the Cross, *Vive Flamme d’amour*, in *Œuvres complètes*, Éd. du Cerf, 1990, p. 1452-1453: “And so it is that love, in festive joyful mood, practises the games of love, in the very palace of love and spiritual marriage”; “those wounds, or otherwise those games, are bursting flames and tender strokes which the fire of love that is never idle prints upon the soul”.

justify such acts”¹. For T. Philippe, the picture is very loaded: sexual abuse, absolution of accomplices, incestuous relations with his sister, abortion, sexual relations with others, etc. In March 1977, in a long report addressed to Bishop Desmazières, T. Philippe himself confirmed that the “very serious denunciations” of which he had been the object in 1952 were very “real in the materiality of the facts”² – “materiality” which he refrained from specifying. Following T. Philippe, from 1952, J. Vanier maintained intimate relationships with a number of adult women. Some present themselves as victims or survivors of abusive relationships; others – few in number – prefer to present themselves as partners in relationships that are certainly transgressive from the point of view of ordinary ecclesial and social norms, but fulfilling affectively, spiritually and sexually. Between the two, the range of situations and positions is diversified. As the report shows, in their diversity, all these relationships are part of a continuum of confusion, control and abuse³.

Sexuality, far from being a taboo under the pen of J. Vanier, is very often on the horizon of his poems, his works and his public lectures. In this matter, he sometimes presents himself as a sage:

Our sexuality, he wrote in 2003, is such a personal and private reality that it is difficult to talk about it. Our heart is so vulnerable. [...] I know what it is to be a gendered person with all that that entails. I’ve had my struggles and my joys in this⁴.

Despite this, it is a great confusion that covers his vocabulary, his relationships, his theology, his way of writing, his way of seducing and entering into a relationship. J. Vanier himself recognizes this “confusion” as a sign of his times, in an unpublished poem which begins: “Yes, confusion in our times”: “Confusion” reigns “in our hearts,” “in our minds,” “in our loves,” “in our faith,” “in our Church,” “in our hope”, etc. This confusion is also, for him, lexical. In a letter to his parents, he thus evokes “ejaculatory prayers”, and specifies a few lines further that it “is often good to leave a

1. Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in reply to questions asked by L’Arche internationale, December 7th, 2019, in Commission Archives.

2. Thomas Philippe, report addressed to Mgr Stéphane Desmazières, bishop of Beauvais, March 11th, 1977, APJV.

3. This vocabulary is presented and defined in parts 3 and 4 of the report.

4. Jean Vanier, teaching given on February 7th, 2003, AJV.

moment of silence after each small ejaculation”¹. Is this a lapsus? Or just ignorance of the French language by this English-speaking Canadian who learned French as a foreign language? If we did not know today the *modus operandi* of certain “orations,” we would not be tempted to detect in the formula one of the horizons of meaning of the “mystico-erotic sect.”

For J. Vanier – the point should be underlined – this great “confusion” of lexicon, feelings, practice does not, however, relate to paedophilia or the sexual abuse of disabled people. This “confusion” is not related to homosexuality either. The possibility of a homosexual relationship between T. Philippe and J. Vanier has certainly been raised in the public debate on the basis of a single testimony to be interpreted with caution. However, it is a hypothesis that should be considered since T. Philippe practiced “prayer on the heart” with men, and that we find in a letter from T. Philippe to J. Vanier an equivocal justification of possibly homosexual relations. at the same time as the possible basis for a form of sexual liberation long before its time. “The distinction of the sexes,” writes T. Philippe to J. Vanier in 1960, no longer has a “raison d’être”, but nevertheless “remains” in the name of the “divine games of love”. The term “dwelling” does not incline towards a homosexual reading of the formula. Be that as it may, eroticism – this “wandering desire for pleasure”, which is both play and sexual pleasure decorrelated from tenderness² – here seems transfigured in view of the “joys of heaven”.

With regard to the homosexual relationship or not of T. Philippe with J. Vanier, in the positive state of its knowledge, the Commission cannot however decide. This remains an open question. On the contrary, we gladly underline, in the testimonies, the large number of women who surrounded J. Vanier. All of the persons designated as victims or survivors are women of legal age. It is important to emphasize that people with disabilities have not been – in the current state of the investigation – victims of the sexual behaviour of T. Philippe or J. Vanier³.

1. Letter of Jean Vanier to his parents, undated, APJV.

2. Paul Ricoeur, *art. cit.*, 1960, p. 232.

3. On this crucial point, we must be careful. For T. Philippe, no report comes from people with disabilities. For Jean Vanier, a survey was conducted by the psychologist of L’Arche in Trosly-Breuil, Ms Pauline Mathieu-Gay, among “people with a disability who have been present in a shelter or living centre for more than 10 years in within

We observe in all the sources – except those of the Holy Office – a certain art in not naming what is strictly sexual and keeping the “modesty” required on these “serious subjects.” Unfinished sentences, understatements, more or less voluntary silences, ellipses, prude circumlocutions, Latin translations. So many elements that reveal the difficulty of speaking up. Socialization, spiritual naivety, affective immaturity or inexperience in sexual matters, social humility, the fear of not being believed... are all causes of impediment to speech. Circumlocutions are sometimes clumsy; the stories multiply the ambiguities or the lies. When T. Philippe had to leave L’Eau vive in 1952 for disciplinary reasons, the students were officially told that he was “tired” then “sick”. J. Vanier will then designate this period of the life of Fr Thomas under the name of the “Great Retreat”¹. What does J. Vanier mean when he writes to a nun that he is delighted to find her soon to make a “little retreat together” to “plunge back into divine love,” since her convent is a “nest of love”²? Is this the ultimate stage of religious sentimentality? Is it the use of a very euphemistic register to signify the immodest?

One never finds an obscene word under the pen of T. Philippe or J. Vanier. With a few rare exceptions that we mention below, the writing seems chaste. Everything is never signified except in half-words. What do these “things” and these “very serious carelessness” that T. Philippe admitted without difficulty in 1952 cover³? Jean Vanier himself writes, in a letter to the Master General of the Dominicans, dated August 8, 1952, that “because of [his] present responsibility at L’Eau vive”, he was “confidentially informed of the facts about the T. R. P. Thomas Philippe. I am not in the dark about the exact facts, and I know well that ‘everything’ is not all slander”⁴. We must assess the double understatement that Jean Vanier then uses at its exact value, and which comes to signify, for him,

the community of Trosly-Breuil”. The two-page report was delivered to the Study Group on February 12, 2021; it concerns 25 people and concludes: “None of the people received expressed having been the victim of sexual abuse by Jean Vanier”.

1. See Xavier Le Pichon, note of August 2011, “La vie cachée du P. Thomas”, 44 p., p. 25-26.

2. Letters to Sœur Marguerite-Marie, Archives from the diocese Meaux.

3. Letter from Thomas Philippe to the General Master of the Order, March 27th, 1952, AGOP.

4. AGOP.

the impossibility of saying the positive.: “I am not ignorant;” “it’s not all slander.” In other words, *he knows; the charges are founded*.

For T. Philippe, from 1952 on, the “things” are said, however, in Latin, but also in French: “Ms. X. told me without further detail ‘*quod ille faciebat ipsam semen suum bibere*’, but I didn’t ask how the show was happening.”, we read in a letter from Fr. de Menasce¹. The words of the woman are naturally *translated into* Latin. T. Philippe, she says, “made her drink his seed.” The fact is identical to that reported by another victim 25 years later². The testimonies are numerous, concordant, coherent, repetitive. They are confirmed over time, on the practical details as well as on the elements of justification. Women who have intimate relations with Jean Vanier develop other ways of describing and suggesting the facts. The anonymous testimony of a consecrated woman, transmitted in May 2021 to the Study Commission, is thus symptomatic and gives, in passing, a glimpse of the differences between the two men:

Kneeling at my feet, me sitting or standing, his head on my breasts, he liked to suck the breasts, then he lifted or undid the bra. Or on his chair, half-lying down, he would take me over him, so half-lying down too, against him who was sometimes erect, it seemed to me. And then, one day, he dragged me onto his bed, and little by little, I don’t know over how many months or years this went on, totally undressed except for my underpants, but he sometimes totally naked. Caresses...

Women sometimes internalize the religious encoding of the romantic relationship. In 1966, a nun wrote to him as follows:

Jesus absorbed me entirely, glued to Your c. d’Ep [husband’s heart] I was intoxicated with the substance of Love and life and this morning I deeply gave myself away—as if you were there. Oh, yes! I pass through You and You pass through me and there is only one single flame that rises straight to the Father, all light and pure! O my Beloved, come inflame your poor little one + and + (more and more)so³.

1. Quote from a letter from Fr. de Menasce, included in the letter from Fr. Paul Philippe to the Master General, June 11th, 1952, AGOP.

2. Michèle-France Pesneau, *op. cit.*, 2020, p 101

3. Letter from Marie-Madeleine Wambergue o. c. d. to Jean Vanier, “Tuesday 21” [June 21th, 1966], APJV.

The sexual explicitness can be read from the pens of women (“I feel that I would have loved you hard, hard, and with a lot of very amusing games. [...] You should come back quickly to enjoy it! [...] The Good God makes me play a lot of His love games with you”¹); it is also, more rarely, from the pen of J. Vanier himself: “O come beloved, oh come, give me your breasts so that I can drink”².

Report plan

Conceived as a bundle of complementary analyses, the report presents itself as a study with several voices.

The first part, which is historical, aims at exploring certain biographical elements concerning J. Vanier, by examining in particular the stages of his training and by studying the human and ecclesial network into which he fits. The following part, also historical, measures the human and cultural continuities between L’Eau vive and L’Arche. The third sociological part looks at the practices and representations of authority (formal and informal) in L’Arche, as exercised by J. Vanier but also by others, in his imitation. The exercise of authority is one of the conditions for the possibility of relationships of influence and abusive acts committed by the founders. They are described and analysed – frontally – in the fourth part of the report. The fifth part explores the medical track and presents the psychiatric hypotheses relating to T. Philippe and J. Vanier. The 6th part offers a psychoanalytical look at the itinerary of J. Vanier. Finally, the seventh part of the report is a critical analysis of the spirituality of J. Vanier. Without denying its interesting aspects, the study of practical theology highlights problematic points, with regard to the affiliation to the spirituality of T. Philippe, and the facts of influence and abuse committed by him.

These analyses – as we will see – are not always perfectly consistent, which is due to legitimate differences in approach and method. The Commission did not want to attenuate or reduce these differences for

1. Letter from Jacqueline d’Halluin to Jean Vanier, undated letter, which begins with “My dear little kitty”, typewritten, APJV.

2. Letter from Jean Vanier to “Brigitte”, January 8th, 1993. On this point, see the chapter 6.

three main reasons: to respect the angles of analysis specific to each researcher; show the complexity of the subject; and open avenues of reflection.

The members of the Study Commission would like to underline their deep commitment to this work. They were overcome by the feeling of touching on a serious, sensitive and painful matter. They are also convinced of the social utility of such work beyond L'Arche.

PART I

**Jean Vanier's journey
(1928-2019)**

Translation: *Gérard Hocmard*

Introduction

Florian Michel

There exists a great number of biographies of Georges and Pauline Vanier¹, Jean's parents, of Jean himself², as well as of Thérèse Vanier (1923-2014)³, his elder sister, who was a medical doctor and the founder of L'Arche in the United Kingdom.

Through Georges Vanier, who was the “incumbent of the highest civil function of the country”⁴, the family belongs to the military and governmental elite of Canada. Metro stations, schools, public buildings and avenues bear the name of someone who was all at once one of the commanders of the legendary 22nd Royal Battalion, a first-rate diplomat and Governor general of Canada from 1959 to 1967. One cannot insist

1. Jean Vanier, *Ma faiblesse, c'est ma force : un aperçu de la vie intérieure du général Georges P. Vanier, gouverneur général du Canada de 1960 à 1967*, Bruxelles, Paris, Montréal, DDB, Bellarmin, 1970. Robert Speaight, *Georges P. Vanier. Soldat, diplomate et gouverneur général*, Fides, 1972. Deborah et George Cowley, *One Woman's Journey. A Portrait of Pauline Vanier*, 1992. Mary Frances Coady, *Georges and Pauline Vanier. Portrait of a couple*, McGill-Queen's University, 2011. Mary Frances Coady, *Mercy within Mercy. Georges and Pauline Vanier and the Search for God*, Londres, 2015. Voir également <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/fr/article/vanier-georges-phileas>

2. Kathryn Spink, *Jean Vanier et l'aventure de l'Arche*, Bellarmin, Montréal 1993, Les Ateliers, 2007. Anne-Sophie Constant, *Jean Vanier : portrait d'un homme libre*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2014.

3. Ann Shearer, *Therese Vanier: Pioneer of L'Arche, Palliative Care and Spiritual Unity*, Londres, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2016.

4. Claude Ryan, “Feu Monsieur Georges Vanier”, *Le Devoir*, 6 mars 1967, cité dans Jean Vanier, *op. cit.*, 1970, p. 67

enough on the aura of the Vanier family in Canada, France or the Vatican, considering how important this is from a historical point of view. Doors open themselves, recommendations abound, supports flow in, etc. Charles de Gaulle held Georges Vanier in high esteem, as being “from the very first day a faithful friend of the Free French and an ardent defender of their cause”¹. At ecclesial level, the beatification process of the Vanier parents was approved by the archbishop of Ottawa on two separate occasions: first for Georges Vanier in 1985, and then for Pauline in 1991. Based on many interviews and on the archives of the family deposited in Ottawa, five volumes have been published with a view to presenting the life and Christian virtues of Georges and Pauline Vanier². The work, hagiographical in the proper sense of the word, both scrupulous and non-committal³, sheds factual light on the different moments of their family life and indicates the names of those who participate (or not) in building up the reputation of sanctity⁴.

The biographers of the Vanier parents and of Jean himself, however, have so far only had access to the outward, expurgated, part of the historical documentation, without a possibility to access all the archive funds (J. Vanier's Personal Archives, Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, etc.). The existing biographies remain relevant to establish a chronology or pinpoint such or such element of the family history or a given moment of J. Vanier's life. It is not part of the objectives of the Commission, or within its means, to rewrite a

1. Charles de Gaulle's letter to Georges Vanier, 6th November 1945, BAC Ottawa, quoted by Roger Quesnel, *Biographie de Monsieur Georges Vanier*, vol. 1, Ottawa 2006, p. 292.

2. Roger Quesnel, *Biographie de Madame Pauline Vanier*, in three volumes, Ottawa, 1997 and 1998, 115 p., 120 p. and 162 p. Roger Quesnel, *Biographie de Monsieur Georges Vanier*, in two volumes, Ottawa 2006, 299 p. and 97 p.

3. We shall only take a few examples not to overload the critical apparatus : in vol. 2 of Georges Vanier's biography, (p. 73-76), the author explains that there are no more letters exchanged between Jean and his parents, while there are nearly 500 in the APJV. About the L'Eau vive affair, he does not say a word (p. 74) of the disciplinary reasons why Thomas Philippe was sent away to Rome. Similarly, on J. Vanier's priesthood vocation (p. 75), the presentation of the reasons why he was not ordained in 1956 is very incomplete: the Holy Office is not mentioned.

4. In L'Arche circles, for instance, the opinion is not unanimous as to Pauline Vanier's reputation of sanctity. Cf op.cit., vol. 3, p. 115-118.

complete biography of the Vanier parents, or even of J. Vanier, in the light of all the new archives that have been unearthed.

This first part of the report will examine five aspects of Jean Vanier's personal development. He stands out as an “inheritor”, in the sociological sense, the son of a well-off family (chapter 1). The second chapter aims at presenting a synthetic view of the extremely complex period of L'Eau vive (1950-1956). J. Vanier's priesthood vocation is thwarted when T. Philippe is condemned by the Holy Office for doctrinal and ethical reasons, but this nevertheless makes him an “almost-priest” and a “prophet” (chapter 3), i.e. almost a cleric, with all the ambiguity this status implies. He is a layman whose priesthood vocation has been made public, who knows the clerical codes inside out and derives from it some functions and charismas (preaching, accompanying, the almost-sacrament of the washing of the feet, etc.).

The philosophical and theological culture he has acquired at L'Eau vive, at Le Saulchoir and at Institut catholique de Paris since his bachelor's and then his doctor's degree (1962) in philosophy gives J. Vanier his intellectual frame (chapter 4). His Ph.D. thesis is not alien to the public resurgence of L'Eau vive, the birth of L'Arche in the early summer of 1964 or his ecclesial recognition. He is given a form of legitimacy. While they call themselves “les tout-petits” (the little ones), members of the circle singularize themselves through their intellectual sophistication: T. Philippe and J. Vanier are “authors” and “doctors”; their bibliography is vast; they use words to elaborate control mechanisms, the culture and the possible conditions of abuses; they produce justifications for their acts and give arguments to circumvent the prohibitions.

The “golden legend” of L'Arche is eventually rooted in the strayed reputation of sanctity surrounding T. Philippe and J. Vanier: this reputation is one of the data of the legend and opens onto the hype of the “star system” enfolding J. Vanier (chapter 5).

CHAPTER 1.
The son of a well-off family (1928-1950)

Florian Michel

“Dearest Pauline and Georges,
Vive Jean François Antonin!
Born in Geneva, he should bring peace to the world?”¹

J. Vanier was born in Geneva in September 1928. He himself told virtually all about his childhood between Switzerland, Canada, England and France, his teenage experience as “cadet” in a British military school and his years of service in the British and then Canadian Navy, with relative precision, in a text written in August 2003².

This testimony has been taken back and enriched by one of his biographers³. The archives, and especially the vast family correspondence permit to get a clearer view. For the period between 1944 and 1950 only, the Study Commission has been able to retrieve and read some

1. Letter from Frances Vanier, Georges’ sister, to Georges and Pauline Vanier, September 14th, 1928 (BAC, vol. 6) on the occasion of Jean’s birth.

2. Photocopied document, entitled “On the prehistory of L’Arche”, unpublished, dated August 2003, available in the APJV and in the King’s College Archives (Box 15 – C77 – 2003-2008). An e-mail by Jean-Christophe Pascal commenting on this document is also available (April 5, 2005, APJV)

3. Kathryn Spink, *The Miracle, the Message, the Story*, Ottawa, Novalis, 2005, translated into French as *Jean Vanier et l’aventure de L’Arche*, Ottawa, Novalis, 2007. Read chapter 7 especially.

250 letters sent by J. Vanier to his parents¹. In July 1959, he presents himself, not without a dose of humour, as “a good boy”².

The parents of a “good boy”

Georges Vanier (1888-1967) and Pauline Archer (1898-1991) get married in September 1921. At the time, Georges is aide-de-camp of the Governor General of Canada, Lord Julian Byng.

Five children are born from their marriage: Thérèse, born in February 1923; Georges, born in November 1925, nicknamed “Byngsie” in honour of his godfather, Lord Julian Byng; Julian, born in March 1927; Jean in September 1928 and Michel, the latecomer, born nearly 18 years after Thérèse. Jean, number 4, thus remains the latest-born of the roost for nearly 13 years.

In 1914, Georges Vanier is lieutenant. His service record during the war is exemplary, mentioning his severe wounds, his medals, his herical behaviour, his presence at the battle of Vimy, a memorable event for Canadian units, etc. In 1921, he embarks on a career at the interface between diplomacy and the military. In 1928, he is the representative of Canada to the Society of Nations in Geneva, J. Vanier's birthplace. In 1939-1940, he is the official representative of Canada in Paris, with the title of envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary, but has to leave after the French defeat. In April 1943, Georges Vanier leaves Montreal for London, where his wife joins him in the summer; he then reaches Algiers alone, as Canadian envoy to General de Gaulle and the Free French, before being sent to Paris, as Canadian Ambassador this time, in the autumn of 1944. He keeps his post until December 1953. He is appointed Governor General of Canada in August 1959 and dies at Rideau Hall in March 1967.

J. Vanier fits in without difficulty in the family model proposed to him, which rests on three pillars: the army, the service of the State

1. Kathryn Spink, *The Miracle, the Message, the Story*, Ottawa, Novalis, 2005, translated into French as *Jean Vanier et l'aventure de L'Arche*, Ottawa, Novalis, 2007. Read chapter 7 especially.

2. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, July 15, 1959, APJV. “In the future, I will be a good boy – shoes shined, chin shaved, hands clean, clean collar, and all the rest.”

– Canada, the British monarchy, the Empire – and the Catholic Church. Although the Vanier family are of French-speaking ancestry, they are, culturally-speaking, very Anglo-Canadian as regards their political commitments, the schooling of their children and the language spoken at home. J. Vanier writes to his parents in English. The personal diary he keeps while in college is in English. The family, however, distinguish themselves from the English-speaking elite of Canada on one point: they are Roman Catholics.

This has often been pointed out by J. Vanier himself or his biographers. His father at one stage thought of entering the seminary. His mother too questions herself about her religious vocation. Both Pauline's mother, called Ganna by her grandchildren, and Pauline herself have been guided spiritually by Fr Almire Pichon (1843-1919)¹, who had been the confessor and spiritual guide of St Thérèse de Lisieux². One must note *en passant* that the Vanier family are very close to the Order of the Carmel. On November 24th, 1949, Thérèse Vanier even becomes a “tertiary” of the Nogent Carmel under the spiritual direction of T. Philippe.

In order to have a clear understanding of the successive sequences of the family history, it is important to bear in mind that, in the second half of 1947, T. Philippe becomes Pauline Vanier's spiritual director. Pauline Vanier's first meeting with him was dating from July 1946. It had been initiated by T. Philippe, who was coming to the embassy in order to approach Pauline Vanier on the occasion of a bazaar organized by L'Eau vive. An exchange of letters ensued (October 1946), in which T. Philippe expressed his wish to see more Canadian students entering Le Saulchoir, the study convent of the Dominican province of France, of which he introduces himself as the Superior, or L'Eau vive, which might become the “spiritual home” of Canadian Catholic students³. In June 1947, T. Philippe this time invites Pauline and Georges Vanier to Le Saulchoir

1. On Fr Almire Pichon: “Born in Carrouges (Orne) February 3rd, 1843, Almire-Théophile-Augustin Pichon joined the Company on October 30th, 1863 and was ordained priest on September 8th, 1873. Doctor of theology, he taught philosophy for years before progressively devoted himself to the ministry, notably to preach during spiritual retreats. <https://www.archives-carmel-lisieux.fr/carmel/index.php/10-almire-pichon-s-j>

2. Spink, *op.cit.*, p. 18-20.

3. T. Philippe's letter to Pauline Vanier, October 20th, 1947, vol. 107, BAC.

for the solemnity of Corpus Christi. “I hope that your son will be able to come along”, he adds¹. Not only does the strong influence of T. Philippe on Pauline Vanier – he will by and by become her spiritual director between the Summer and Autumn of 1947 – date back to that invitation to Le Saulchoir, but a hypothesis is that it was also the first time J. Vanier had met T. Philippe, for he actually was in Paris at the beginning of June 1947⁴.

As concerns T. Philippe's spiritual direction, the correspondence published between Pauline Vanier and Mother Marie de la Croix, an English Carmelite nun, is especially enlightening. The nun invites Pauline to “go slow” with T. Philippe and to “take precautions”: “*I do mistrust people who offer themselves to help the souls of others*”, “*I feel on my guard about him*”². The nun recommends her friend not to trust him for spiritual direction, but to simply go to him for confession “once or twice”. “*What comes to me through your letter is that he is slightly rushing at you*”³. These are strong words, suggesting predation. As was pointed out, as early as the Summer of 1947 Pauline Vanier holds T. Philippe for “a saint”⁴.

In November 1987, Pauline Vanier, despite her friend's call for prudence, takes the plunge: she is now “directed” by T. Philippe and describes his spiritual direction in the following terms: “*Through prayer and nothing but love*”⁵. In the Winter of 1948, Pauline Vanier's proximity to the Nogent Carmel becomes ever closer: she meets the prioress, multiplies her readings of the major Carmel saints, etc.

When J. Vanier comes to L'Eau vive in September 1950, he is then meeting up with a monk, the spiritual guide of his mother, whom he had met before through his parents. What was the date, what were the circumstances when the two men met? It is difficult to answer with

1. T. Philippe's letter to Pauline Vanier, October 20th, 1947, vol. 107, BAC.

2. See J. Vanier's correspondence with his parents over that period. APJV.

3. Mère Marie de la Croix's letter to Pauline Vanier, June 18th 1947, quoted by M. F. Coady, op. cit., 2015, p. 65. P. 64-66 especially show with precision both Pauline Vanier's hesitations, Mother Marie de la Croix's call to prudence and Pauline Vanier's eventual choice.

4. Mère Marie de la Croix's letter to Pauline Vanier, June 19th 1947, quoted by M. F. Coady, op. cit., p 67

5. M. F. Coady, op. cit., p. 68.

certainty, but one may advance the hypothesis that this was either in June 1947, at Le Saulchoir, on the occasion of the celebration of Corpus Christi, or a little later, “around 1948-1949” at the Nogent Carmel, towards which several tracks converge: this is where T. Philippe preaches, where Pauline Vanier is a tertiary, and where Élisabeth de Miribel and sister Thérèse de Jésus, both of them friends of the family, are living as nuns¹.

A wartime childhood

As a child, J. Vanier follows the military and diplomatic postings of his father: Geneva at his birth, London in the 1930s, Paris on the eve and at the beginning of the Second World War, then Montreal between 1940 and 1942. Both in London and Montreal, he and his siblings frequent the best Catholic private schools. Tossed about by the fortunes of war and caught in the turmoil of the French debacle in the Spring of 1940, the Vanier family needs first to cross the Channel in hazardous conditions in May 1940. It is then necessary to cross the Atlantic from England to Canada in July 1940. In Montreal in September 1940, Jean attends Loyola College, founded by Irish Jesuits to cater for English-speaking Catholics. The family archives have kept several of Jean's term transcripts as well as a diary, in English, which he kept between October and December 1941².

Since the Spring of 1942, the family is scattered owing to a combination of circumstances: three members of the family, Byngsie, Bernard and young Michel, remain in Montreal, a heartbreak for the parents.

1. On this point, see the narrative given by J. Vanier in October 1994 (APJV). “I met Fr Thomas a year before I left the Navy, towards 1948-1949. Mummy was telling that, as she was at the embassy one day, a Dominican arrived to ask for help for a bazaar organized by a charity called L'Eau vive; it must have been in 1947 [1946 actually]. She by and by discovered that Fr Thomas was the chaplain of several carmels and she progressively became Fr Thomas's child. She had a very close friend of hers, called Sister Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus living at the Nogent Carmel and she would go there every week when Fr Thomas was preaching, to listen to him and meet him. During one of those visits I had met Fr Thomas en passant, because Élisabeth de Miribel, a very close friend of the Vanier family was living in that carmel.”

2. Vol. 13. BAC

The other four: Thérèse, Jean, Georges and Pauline leave for England – separately – between the Spring of 1942 and the Summer of 1943. For at the beginning of the Spring of 1942, Jean, aged 13, takes exams with a view to being schooled in a military school in England, the Royal Naval College of Dartmouth, Devon. He obtains a pass at the end of April 1942. Georges is ecstatic and gives thanks for the “protection of Providence”: “*Overjoyed grateful Providence Protection. Jock passed successful examination*”¹. Georges Vanier pulls a few strings in the naval service of the Department of National Defense in Ottawa and at Canada House, London, in order to get an exit visa, a passage on a ship as well as all the books needed at the Naval Cadet School² as soon as possible for his son. Jean arrives in England towards the end of May or beginning of June 1942. He is joining his sister Thérèse, who had arrived a few months earlier to also serve in the British army.

J. Vanier has told many times, orally or in writing, about a decision which he holds to have been fundamental. He wants to learn how to use weapons, he wants to join the Navy, to serve. His father trusts him. “*I trust you. If such is your wish, you must do it*”³. His sorrowful mother is in tears. Towards the end of May or beginning of June 1942 he crosses the Atlantic from Halifax to Liverpool by himself on a military ship. Once in England he takes the train for London and, exhausted, falls asleep on the doorsteps of the house where his sister lives. The family archives confirm the mainline of the narrative. Georges, who is seeing Jean away to Halifax, writes to his wife on the day of the latter’s departure:

Jock is not too nervous – a bit tired and tense, but less than I would have thought. It is fortunate that I am with him – he would have found it all more painful – once in Halifax he will be caught into the adventure and movement?! He is full of initiative and courage, sensitive and generous, a fine nature that has found its way. You were admirable in sacrifice – I know that you have suffered a lot, but the Good Lord granted you a special grace, otherwise you would have flinched. I admire and I love you, my darling wife. Your Georges.⁴

1. Telegram dated April 30th, 1941. Vol. 14.

2. Vol. 13. BAC.

3. J. Vanier, “Sur la Préhistoire de l’Arche”, 2003, p. 1. APJV.

4. Georges’s letter to Pauline Vanier of no precise date (May 1942), vol 12. BAC

This is definitely a break but not a plunge into the unknown. That a teenager should wish to follow in the footsteps of his father, an officer, in the course of the Second World War; that a Canadian teenager, brought up in British, English-speaking schools, should wish to join the British Navy; that the son of an officer should wish to be schooled in a military college is altogether highly understandable. J. Vanier was noting down that in his class at Loyola there were many leaving in order to join the army¹.

J. Vanier’s life in England is that of a boarder. In Devon at first, but very soon afterwards in Chester, in North-West England, where the school is removed once the Dartmouth premises have been bombed by German aircraft (while the students are absent, in September 1942). His results at the cadet school are rather uneven. The archives have kept the term transcripts. His work in mathematics, history and English are “excellent”. French, however, is more questionable:

He has no great gifts in the way of brains or athletic ability but he is a very likeable character and should do well in the long run”; “In French, he is still liable to spoil his results by relying solely on his natural ability and being careless over his written work².

Two years later, “Some of his written work, especially English into French, is hardly up to the standard”³. The problem will persist throughout the life of Jean Vanier, for he has learnt French as a foreign language.

Through the abundant correspondence of the family, we learn that J. Vanier is a happy boarder, despite moments of deep sadness⁴. Pauline arrives in England in June 1943. The reunion of the family naturally is a much awaited-for perspective:

He is expecting you with the impatience of a baby, it is very touching. Jock is admirable, very religious, waking up every morning at 7:15 to serve Mass, etc. He probably benefits from a special protection, no doubt – life has not spoiled him, he has remained a chil.⁵

1. See J. Vanier’s diary on Nov. 21st and 26th, 1941, vol. 13. BAC

2. Mark transcript, 4th term, August 24th, 1943. Vol. 14, BAC

3. Mark transcript, 10th term, Summer 1945. APJV.

4. Georges’s letter to Pauline, June 1st, 1943, vol. 14. BAC.

5. Georges’s letter to Pauline Vanier, March 29th, 1943, vol. 14. BAC.

J. Vanier is then in his 15th year; he has not seen his mother since May 1942. One can once again observe the marks of the family's piety – daily communion, Mass service – and the father's comments: the “special protection” which Jean “probably benefits from”, a somewhat naïve and rather ingenuous phrasing considering his 15 years of age. The phrase “life has not spoiled him” calls for an interpretation: to say the least, he is still full of the spontaneous and natural reactions of childhood.

Even if no one around them dies, J. Vanier and his family experience the anxieties of the time, but with all the privileges of the *upper class*. What is hardest is the separation of the family. In September 1945, J. Vanier writes his grandmother that it is three years since he last saw the Canadian part of the family, namely his grandmother and his three brothers. “*I feel so separated from all my brothers. I feel I hardly know them now for they have changed so much in these last few years*”¹. Once the war is over, J. Vanier only sees his family when on leave. He often visits his parents in France, where the family cell is reconstituted, in reduced format owing to the growing obligations of each of them.

J. Vanier altogether spends eight years under the mast, from the Spring of 1942 until the Summer of 1950. He had arrived in Dartmouth as a young teenager; when he leaves the Navy, he is a young man of almost 22. He has described what those years meant: learning discipline, learning the art of command, together with a very English culture, sport, long journeys, meeting the Royal family, sailing the seas from the Caribbean to America and South Africa, stopping in ports, notably in Halifax, Cuba or New York, with a few months of study at the Royal Naval College in Greenwich in “sciences, literature, kind of university-wise”² in the Autumn of 1947.

In July 1947, in the context of the demobilization and downsizing of the Royal Navy personnel, he considers applying for a transfer from the Royal Navy to the Canadian Royal Navy (RCN)³. According to his information, 45 000 sailors are to be laid off before March 1948. He obtains his transfer to the RCN in October-December 1947⁴. “I should

1. J. Vanier's letter to Ganna, September 20th, 1945, vol. 17. BAC

2. J. Vanier, text already quoted, 2003, p. 2.

3. Jean's letter to Georges Vanier, July 3rd 1947, vol. 18., BAC.

4. J. Vanier, text already quoted, 2003, p. 2.

leave before I'm axed”, he comments¹. He is then appointed as officer on board the plane-carrier *Magnificent*, based at Halifax, in Nova Scotia.

Jean's leaving the Navy in 1950 for a year of vocational discernment is a new break in his existence. His sister Thérèse and his brother Georges have been demobilized. Thérèse then wishes to embrace medical studies, “Byngsie” expresses his wish to join the Cistercians in Vézelay in August. On October 26th 1947, Georges Vanier writes to his son “Byngsie”: “*You have given to our union in the sacrament of marriage a sense of holy fulfilment*”². A few weeks later “Byngsie” enters La Trappe in Oka, West of Montreal, under the name of “Friar Benedict”. He is ordained as a priest in Marche 1952 in Montreal cathedral. Both Friar Benedict and Thérèse Vanier pass away a few weeks apart in the Spring of 2014.

What vocational itinerary?

As we saw, J. Vanier, whether in Montreal or London, takes communion daily and regularly serves Mass. He also regularly goes to confession. As regards his Dartmouth years, he sums up his insertion in the Church in a few words: “The Catholics would attend a parish in town. They also received religious instruction every week or fortnight. It was neither very deep nor interesting, something like a thick Apologeticum!”³. J. Vanier himself underlines the continuous line of his life of faith from childhood to adulthood: there was no adolescent crisis, no doubt, but a long deepening and strengthening throughout the years. “When at school in Canada (and even before Canada), I would go to Mass and take communion every morning. My faith was simple”⁴. “In naval college, my faith was real, but not deep”⁵. “I wanted to love Jesus, and the Navy helped me in this, but nothing more”. [...] In eight years in the

1. Jean's letter to Georges Vanier, July 3rd 1947, vol. 18., BAC.

2. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, October 19th 1947, APJV: “The news of the week is that my transfer has been granted and in December I will be in the Royal Canadian Navy. Isn't it wonderful?”

3. Ibidem, APJV.

4. Georges Vanier's letter to “Byngsie”, quoted by M. F. Coady, op. cit., 2015, p. 57.

5. 2003, p. 2.

Navy, I never had any doubts as to my Christian faith". I began being attracted to the faith" towards "the end of 1947". He points out the continuity with the family's religious practice: "I would regularly go to the church, some 15 minutes' walk away, to attend Mass. I started reading books of spirituality. My elder brother entered La Trappe in Oka, my parents would go to Mass every morning and I would go with them when I was on holiday. Élisabeth de Miribel, a nun at the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel, was writing to me and I was writing to her".

He writes, without giving a precise date, that one day, as he was "in the wild", "my heart was full of love and light, a real experience of God". "In 1949", while in the Navy, "I would read the breviary daily". On the *Magnificent*, "we had Mass everyday".

Owing to the time he spent in the Navy and his Anglo-Saxon cultural background, young Vanier's catholicism bears the mark of US catholicism. He avidly discovers *The Seven Storey Mountain* by Thomas Merton, a Franciscan converted from Protestantism through his reading (among others) of a book by Étienne Gilson. In New York City or, more broadly, wherever he stops over in the U.S. with the Canadian Navy, he discovers the misery of big cities, racial segregation, etc. In New York, he also meets Catherine Doherty and discovers her "Friendship houses". The experience has a profound effect on him as it makes him discover deep human poverty¹.

In the course of 1949, when he is pondering over his vocation and maturing his desire to become a priest, J. Vanier is in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In the Autumn of 1949, he places himself in the hands of Fr Hector Daly (1900-1969)², a Jesuit whom he had met at Loyola College in 1941-1942 and who had been "Byngsie"'s spiritual counsellor for two years. Fr Daly's and J. Vanier's paths thus cross each other twice,

1. J. Vanier's letters to his parents, 1946-1947. APJV.

2. See "Hector Daly", Dictionary of Jesuit Biography, Ministry to English Canada. 1842-1987, Canadian Institute of Jesuit Studies, Toronto, Ontario, 1991, vol. 1, p. 77-78. Between 1936 and 1948, Father Daly teaches French and religion at Loyola (Montreal). From 1948 to 1951 he is appointed at St Mary's College in Halifax. He is responsible for the Notre-Dame sodalities and for the Catholic Action of Youth, as national English-speaking chaplain, appointed in 1941. The biographical note indicates: "He exerted considerable influence on students throughout the country. He was a patient and understanding counsellor".

in different places and at different moments, in Montreal in 1941-1942 and in Halifax in 1949-1950¹. "In Halifax", he notes in 2003, "there was a Jesuit house and I asked Fr Daly to be my spiritual director"². It was on the invitation of Fr Daly that J. Vanier was brought to follow a discernment retreat at the Jesuit house of Montreal at the end of April-beginning of May 1950³.

Documents enable us to precisely retrace J. Vanier's passage from the Canadian Navy to L'Eau vive in September 1950, for a time then considered as a single foundation year, in order to develop his vocation and complete a training that he judges incomplete and deficient.

Let us pore over a few documents and quote long passages from letters that J. Vanier sent to inform his parents of his life choice (May-June 1950), as well as Fr Daly's letter to them (May 22nd, 1950), T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier (May 30th or 31st, 1950), and a few letters that enable to understand the Vanier parents' stance in their son's choice of L'Eau vive.

Under an appearance of prudence, J. Vanier's discernment seems incomplete indeed, not so much as to his vocation itself as to where it is being matured. The decision to join L'Eau vive is taken under a double standard and at two different levels. On the Canadian side, Hector Daly wants to behave most conscientiously. He presents himself as "being very conservative when it comes to guiding a soul that shows the signs of a vocation". He, however, has no clue about L'Eau vive and is *a priori* neither for nor against. He therefore needs information and,

both reasonably and imprudently, turns toward Pauline Vanier to get it. This is reasonable because she is theoretically well informed, but imprudent since she is J. Vanier's mother and herself "directed", as we saw, by T. Philippe.

1. Le Canada ecclésiastique. Annuaire du clergé, Montréal, Beauchemin, 1949, p. 456.

2. Jean Vanier, quoted text, 2003, p. 3-4.

3. On the date of that retreat, see Jean Vanier's letter to his parents, May 5, 1950: "This is rather late in being written [the previous letter was dating from April 17] and I feel a bit guilty about it. It is already Friday. Just this time last week I was with Byngsie, but I will tell you all about that later."

J. Vanier's decision in favor of L'Eau vive thus involves the question of Pauline Vanier's spiritual direction by T. Philippe. The decision thus appears circular since it is made among J. Vanier, his mother and T. Philippe¹. Hector Daly is asking for – and will not get² – enlightenment from a third, supposedly impartial, person. The process therefore lacks exterior and objective verification. T. Philippe is the one making the offer and inviting. Very intrusive parents facilitate their son's decision to join *L'Eau vive*. Once the decision is envisaged, Pauline Vanier is, as T. Philippe phrases it, "in admiration of the channels of Providence", which allow her not only to find her son again in France after years of separation but also to entrust him to her own spiritual father. As to Georges Vanier, he urges the Canadian general staff to liberate his son from his military obligations so that he might follow his priest's vocation at L'Eau vive.

Before the loop is looped, it is however important to point out that in the Spring of 1950, after his discernment retreat in Montreal, J. Vanier at first expected to go to the New York "Friendship House", in Thomas Merton's footsteps and following Catherine Doherty. As was said, he had been struck by his meeting the poor at the "Friendship House" when the *Magnificent* had stopped over in New York: in his letter to his parents, the poor become "magnificent". But Hector Daly refuses this choice of life, with strong reasons that J. Vanier forwards to his parents. He eventually chooses L'Eau vive on the basis of an analysis of a letter written by T. Philippe, which, oddly enough, the archives do not keep. He then expects to stay at L'Eau vive "less than a year". In J. Vanier's decision, France, with the perspective of being closer to his parents that it entails, plays at least as important a role in his discernment as the project of L'Eau vive itself or the person of T. Philippe.

1. The situation was very different for "Byngsie"'s vocation. On August 20, 1946, he orally informs his parents of his "decision" to enter Oka Abbey, in Canada, not far from the land of "his fathers". He then comments: "God's Providence worked through normal channels as a rule". He asks neither advice nor recommendations and joins a Canadian community. See M.F. Coady, *op. cit.*, 2015, p. 54-56.

2. Hector Daly's archives do not hold any letter from Pauline Vanier. Archives of the Jesuits in Canada, Montreal.

J. Vanier's vocation. Letter to his parents, May 21st, 1950, 7 pages handwritten. APJV.

Magnificent
Halifax

Dearest Mummy and Daddy,

This letter has been a long time to be written but such is the will of God. [...] Tomorrow morning I will be handing in my resignation to the RCN. But I suppose I ought to begin right at the beginning. It has been for over a year now that I have felt that Our Lord has been calling me to a higher form of life. [*J. Vanier tells of his hesitations: monk or priest? which order?*]

At one time I felt positive that He wanted me at the Benedictine Monastery on the Isle of Wight, but He in his wisdom knew what I in my pride and day dreams did not know – that I was terribly immature spiritually.

But he had sown the seed and it was up to me to water it. When I left for Canada I thought that I would probably be in France as a civilian before a year had passed and I prayed that I would find a director wherever I was to be stationed.

Two days after my arrival in Halifax I heard Father Daly was at the Jesuit College and so I placed myself in his hands. My prayer had been answered. He had been Byngsie's director for the four years at Loyola.

Nothing could be done until I made a closed retreat, so I just had to bide my time and wait for the first opportunity that came my way. [*That was impossible during the Christmas break, Jean then tells about his stopping over in New York and his meeting with the people at "Friendship House"*]. I was overcome by it and loved the people there and I felt a great sadness at parting with them. The happiness, peace, dedication to Christ and poverty were magnificent.

Back in Halifax, I was able to get ten days leave and so I wished off to Montreal and spent 3 days at the Jesuit Novitiate at the Sault. On the third day I tackled the job of finding out the will of God – what did He want me to do? Logically, I put down on paper all the pros and cons.

First thing certain was that I should leave the navy at the first opportunity. [*J. Vanier does not have time to study or pray. He does not have the solitude he wishes; the atmosphere of the Navy is rather "pagan"*].

I was also certain, as was my director there, that God wanted me in the priesthood but in what order? That He did not make clear.

That meant I had to spend some time out of the Navy preparing myself – during that time I would have to study philosophy (you know how bad my education is) and most of all increase my spiritual life.

[At the end of his retreat, J. Vanier envisages to go and spend some time at "Friendship House" in New York. Upon returning to Halifax, he mentions this project to Fr Daly, who asks for a delay to think it over and who, two days later, refuses the idea that he might go and get a training at "Friendship House"].

He told me his verdict: No. I was, as you can imagine, very disappointed. His reasons were: 1/ too much liberty at Friendship House and too little strict guidance; 2/ not much time for philosophy, too tiring. [...]

What he suggested was that I should take up a post as a teacher at the school attached to some Dominican monasteries, or the Benedictines, or the Franciscans. There I would study philosophy under guidance, and I would be under a strict director. He felt sure that within a year God would manifest His will to me and I would know what order to join.

Then came the worry of what place – so I wrote to a Fr Lafarge in America, Fr Gorman in England and Père Thomas Philippe in France telling them my story and asking them if they knew of any suitable places. I was certain that God would make abundantly clear to me where he wanted me to go by the answers I would receive from those letters.

Yesterday, I received the answer¹ from Père Thomas, previous to that I had heard from Fr Lafarge and Fr Gorman. Père Thomas' letter convinced me that L'Eau Vive is the place where I can best find what God wills me to do and where I can best prepare myself for the graces He sees fit to send me.

This morning I presented the three letters to Fr Daly and he was of the same opinion. But not knowing the place and wishing to take every precaution he is going to write to you to ask a disinterested priest his opinion.

So there it is. To-morrow I hand in my resignation. I have no idea how long it will take to get through, maybe a month, maybe two. [J. Vanier then tells about his agenda between his resignation and September. He would like to spend August with his parents; will take a ship to England as soon as possible.]. I will spend the month of August with you and then early September I will go to Eau vive. I expect to be there about a year – may be less – preparing myself for what is to come.

There is little more I can say except to tell you of my own happiness and peace. [J. Vanier launches himself into giving thanks to God and also thanks his parents]. Your prayers and your example have done more than I have ever done. [J. Vanier then refers to the diffusion of the piece of news: Byngsie already knows part of the story. Jean will write to the other members of the family].

1. Letter not found in the archives, in Ottawa or APJV.

I will also write to Père Thomas tonight. My only regret is that I haven't spoken to you sooner. [...]

[The letter ends with a P.S., meant for Élisabeth de Miribel, then a novice at the Nogent Carmel.] Thank her of all her prayers which have been so graciously answered.

Letter from Hector Daly to Pauline Vanier, May 22nd, 1950, APJV :

University of Saint Mary's College
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Mrs Vanier,

This letter will come as a surprise but not so to a mother's heart. As you know, Jock has been under my spiritual guidance for the last 7 months. He is "*une âme d'élite*". He reminds me so much of Georges [Byngsie] whose director I was for 4 years at Loyola.

I am a very prudent man, very conservative when guiding a soul who shows signs of a vocation. A month ago I considered the time had come for Jock to make a retreat to discover God's will in his life. For reasons which Jock will explain to you I opposed firmly his desire to go to Friendship House in New York. I am perfectly satisfied that your son is destined to priesthood, but there remains the question: which order? It is a delicate problem, one which can be solved only by prayer and spiritual guidance. After praying over it, I told Jock to write you that he should hand in his resignation in the Navy and return to France. We dismissed the American and English possibilities of joining an order in those two countries. This Jock will explain to you when he meets you. That leaves him with a choice in France. He is deeply attracted to Eau vive and by Fr Philippe o.p., who wrote him a magnificent letter [not found in the archives] and advised him to come to Eau vive. Personally, I can see that Eau vive would be the ideal solution to discover God's will in Jock's life. But the reason why I am writing to you is ask you to consider my advice. I want you to find some devoted and educated priest in Paris (Jesuit) and seek his advice as to whether Eau vive would be the right thing for Jock to do. My reason for asking you to do this is that I feel that Jock is not sufficiently detached in his decision to go to Eau vive and I want an impersonal, objective judgment on this question. I know the esteem in which you hold Fr. Philippe (I hope I am spelling his name correctly) but since we are seeking God's will we must be objective. Any priest who knows the Eau vive background and to whom you can explain Jock's case should be

able to pass a safe judgment. Fr Gorman to whom Jock wrote does not approve of Eau vive. That's why I have tried to act so prudently. Jock's letter will explain everything to you. It has been a heavy responsibility which Jock placed on my shoulders as he needs direction in spiritual matters. He is one of the finest young men that I have known, refined and generous. [...]

The letter ends with :

I admit, however, that my role has ended in guiding Jock, except, of course, to pray for him and for your family.

Letter from T. Philippe to J. Vanier, May 30th or 31st, 1950. APJV.

L'Eau vive
Soisy-sur-Seine

My dear, dear friend

I have well received your letter dated May 21st and I immediately entrusted you to the Blessed Virgin Mary, that *she* might receive you at L'Eau vive. While sending you my first letter [*not found in the archives*], I was begging that you might come to L'Eau vive if such was her will. It did seem to me, after praying and thinking it over, that such was the will of Our Lord and His Holy Mother, but since we may always err, I was beseeching her that everything might fit in as she wanted.

I think it useless to tell you that your parents are overjoyed. I am to see your mother tomorrow and I gave her a call tonight. She is in admiration at the ways of Providence.

All your plans seem all right to me. Do pray a lot for our student hall at L'Eau Vive. Be sure that while looking forward to seeing you again I remain deeply and intimately united in the silence of prayer.

On June 14th, 1950, in a letter to his parents, J. Vanier comes back again on the demand for a letter of recommendation from a priest neutral as to L'Eau vive: "*By the way have you yet spoken to an 'unbiased priest' about my proposed plan? That I will take as the final assent, the final proof that is what God wills.*"¹ The issue does not crop up again in the next letters. Nothing in the archives, however, indicates that it has been solved.

As regards Jean's leaving of the Navy, the archives have also kept the correspondence exchanged between Georges Vanier and Vice-Admiral

1. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, June 14, 1950, APJV.

Grant, Chief of the Naval Staff. Jean Vanier officially justifies his resignation, dated May 22nd, by his call for priesthood. This decision to make it public is rather surprising. It does worry him, as he explains to his parents on June 4th, that this will probably prevent a refusal, and the obligation to reimburse the cost of his years of training¹.

Georges Vanier's answer, on June 29th, 1950, is extremely significant. He justifies his son and begs his correspondent, quite paradoxically, to forward his son's resignation application as urgently as possible, since it is something between Jock and God, in which no human should interfere:

Jock's aspiration transcends the human level. Knowing him as I do, I feel sure that he is answering the Master's call. As you have been kind enough to ask me for my comments, I can only say that this is a matter between God and him, in which man if possible should not interfere. I feel it my duty therefore to urge you most earnestly to forward his application to the Minister of National Defence for approval and I would be very grateful to you if you could expedite the procedure so that he may enter L'Eau vive as soon as possible.²

In September 1950, J. Vanier joins L'Eau vive. It was not his first choice, but a certain number of prudential or circumstantial reasons – a most human thing – lead him to accept the project of L'Eau vive: Hector Daly's refusal of his first choice, i.e. New York, the proximity with his parents after eight years of separation, France, the letter from T. Philippe which has not been found. Was his interior liberty preserved in the choice made? The answer seems to have to be positive, even if Hector Daly underlines the fact that J. Vanier was "*deeply attracted*" to T. Philippe and that he was not "*sufficiently detached*". It is a comparative analysis – apparently shared by Hector Daly and J. Vanier – that leads him to opt for L'Eau vive, ruling out the other two projects of Frs Lafarge and Gorman. The question of making sure of "God's will", which is not that of the historian but of the protagonists, must eventually be formulated differently: Hector Daly intends to remain "objective", but on this point – as was said – the lack of a touchstone is visible,

1. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, June 4th, 1950: "I was certain that I could not just purchase my discharge without giving adequate reasons."

2. Vol. 20, BAC.

masked by T. Philippe's reputation: "I know the esteem in which you hold Fr Philippe", Hector Daly writes to Pauline Vanier.

What sexual awakening?

The question of Jean Vanier's sexual awakening is legitimate. He himself was trying to answer it in an autobiographical text written in 2003. The answer he puts forward, however, is not final: what sexual education did he receive, if any? What were his desires? What was his emotional life like before his arrival at L'Eau vive? The Study Commission must admit that it has not found many precise and final elements to date. One is reduced to examining a single testimony, Jean Vanier's, which needs to be put in perspective in the context of the time. Several elements require to be specified in order to do so: the Catholic culture of the time, the military culture and, more widely, the culture following the end of WW2 (radio, cinema, literature, etc.), even if no element in the archives allows to perceive too large a permeability between J. Vanier's intimate personality and the societal context.

Between the discourse of the magisterium and the moral life of a Catholic schoolboy or a young sailor, for instance, the link is most of the time rather uncertain. In the year that followed J. Vanier's birth, Pius XI was thus publishing the *Divini illius magistri* encyclical on the "Christian education of youth" (1929). The pope was speaking out against "a certain sexual education" that would not underline enough that the remedies against "the sins of the flesh" are to train the will, avoid sinning occasions and provide help through grace and the sacraments, that of confession especially. Pius XI was then recognizing the necessity of a correct instruction in "such a delicate matter": "Taking into account all the circumstances, an individual instruction becomes necessary, in given time and provided by the one who has received from God an educational mission and a statutory grace", that is to say the father of the family. According to the Vatican's prescriptions, Georges Vanier is responsible for his sons' instruction. Did he exchange with his four sons on "such a delicate matter"? There is no answer to the question.

A correct sexual instruction of the generation of young Catholics which J. Vanier belongs to is also one of the preoccupations of Pius XII

who, in 1951, was referring to the "baneful propaganda" of moral corruption, in the Catholic world included¹.

In Quebec, rather fine analyses of "sexual pedagogy" in the schools exist for the years 1930-1960². Sexuality is sometimes said to have been the object of a silence conspiracy before the "Quiet Revolution" of the 1960s. Contrary to received ideas, "sexual pedagogy" seems to have rested on three major components: the education to chastity, the ennobling of sexuality and the development of a more "modern" and scientific pedagogical discourse. Books on "the mysteries of life", at the interface of medicine, educational science and ethics, actually abound in Quebec in the early 1930s, in order to educate to purity and virtue, inform in a delicate and appropriate manner, shape the hearts and the wills, etc. What, in this respect, was the discourse of the Jesuits at Loyola College like in the years 1940-1942? This is difficult to ascertain. How was the conscience of the teenager named J. Vanier opened and closed? Here again, it is difficult to this day to know it with precision.

As regards the English college and the British Navy, it is also impossible to draw final conclusions. On a historical plan, the sexual behaviour of the Anglo-American troops present in Italy and in France in 1943-1944 has been the subject of multiple studies³. Prostitution, rapes, sexual diseases, military bordellos, prophylactic measures: such was the horizon during the Liberation of Europe. For the United States, the 1945-1951 period must not be considered in a puritanical light. In 1945, Jean-Paul Sartre after many others describes the sexuality of the American youth as he glimpsed it in New York City in this way: the ground littered with condoms in the back courtyards of

1. https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/fr/speeches/1951/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19510918_padri-francia.html

2. Gaston Desjardins, "La pédagogie du sexe : un aspect du discours catholique sur la sexualité au Québec (1930-1960)", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, volume 43, n° 3, Winter 1990.

3. See for instance Lilly J, Le Roy François, "L'armée américaine et les viols en France. Juin 1944-mai 1945", *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 2002/3 (no 75), p. 109-121. Roberts Mary Louise, "La photo du GI viril : genre et photojournalisme en France à la Libération", *Le Mouvement Social*, 2007/2-3 (n° 219-220), p. 35-56. Julie Le Gac, "'Le mal napolitain' : les Alliés et la prostitution à Naples (1943-1944)", *Genre & Histoire [En ligne]*, 15 | Automne 2014-Printemps 2015.

co-educational colleges, cars stopped at night on the roadside with their lights shut, etc¹. In 1951, Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* follows a teenager's geographical and human wandering along the streets of New York on a background of sexuality. This being said, J. Vanier seems very well protected against such a context. It is very unlikely that he should have read the avant-garde literature of the time. On D-Day, he is still in College in England: in the Summer of 1944 he is just going on 16. He belongs to the cohort that misses the Liberation, while people two or three years older are "heroes" on the stage of history. In New York, in the Spring of 1950, what catches his eye is not the vice of a huge city as observed by Sartre, but, more virtuously, the home for the poor at Friendship House.

J. Vanier attended all-boy schools. The British Navy does employ women, commonly called WRENS (Women's Royal Naval Service), but there is a strong probability that he only discovers female sociability upon arriving at L'Eau vive, which actually is the first mixed society that he is involved with. To read him, J. Vanier rather gives an impression of great ingenuity. The image he gives of himself is that of a pious and amiable cadet, then of a young officer fond of sport who reads his breviary, a sort of seminarist, not too keen on studies, who cherishes the idea of a sound body in a pious soul. Here is what he writes in 2003 about those years in the Navy:

I had never had great moral or sexual temptations. I was passionate about my job; I had a great sense of duty, but I was awkward with girls. I was bored at dances that I was more or less obliged to attend. Life among officers my age was very correct, very righteous, lived in religious terms².

J. Vanier does not feel much attracted by the sociability of young adults and does not appreciate the initiation rites to love, which dances, albeit Navy dances, represent. He is rather solitary, stand-offish, chaste, hardly enterprising since he "gets bored" at parties, "awkward" with girls – which girls? Tim Hollis, a class mate, recalls a "flirt" of J. Vanier³, which, for him – perhaps to unconsciously ward

1. Denis Lacorne, *De la religion en Amérique*, Gallimard, 2012, p. 248.

2. J. Vanier, text quoted, 2003, p. 2

3. Interview of Tim Hollis by the Commission.

off a current cliché about the Navy – highlights the pure correct, righteous friendship with the other officers, his colleagues,

By definition, the question of sex is posed to every generation. Beyond the warnings of Pius XI and Pius XII and the context, beyond the received, rather trite, ideas as to sailors' sexuality, it is quite likely that J. Vanier arrived at L'Eau vive with a somewhat limited experience of emotional life. His intellectual background is limited to a naval officer's knowledge: no higher studies *stricto sensu*, no philosophy, no theology. He has sailed the seas, been leading men, but has never fallen in love, has never had "great temptations". His culture is very spiritual, very liturgical, very pious.

CHAPTER 2.
**Jean Vanier, Thomas Philippe
and L'Eau vive (1950-1956)**

Antoine Mourgès

As he joins the community at *L'Eau vive* in September 1950, J. Vanier enters an important stage of his life. He is giving up a military career and henceforth wants to devote his life to God, starting by discerning the exact form of his vocation. What he thinks will be a short transitional period is prolonged over six years and eventually constitutes the founding experience of his life. At the heart of it are the intense, indefectible relationships that, in the wake of his parents, he builds with T. Philippe and a few other members of *L'Eau vive*.

L'Eau vive: the official and the dark sides

Located in Soisy-sur-Seine, next door to Le Saulchoir, the convent school of the Dominicans of the Province of France, repatriated from Belgium in 1938, *L'Eau vive* was founded by T. Philippe in 1945 as an international training centre for young people from all over the world. Hybrid by nature, half-way, as we will see, between a religious community, a youth hostel and an American-style “university college”, it proposes a foundation in theology and philosophy as well as an introduction to contemplative life based on Carmelite mysticism and a strong Marian devotion.

The soul of *L'Eau vive* is T. Philippe, a Dominican, who teaches theology at Le Saulchoir, and then at the Angelicum in Rome, while being also Regent of Studies at Le Saulchoir. He represents an intellectual and spiritual current distinct from the “historical Thomism”¹ of Le Saulchoir upheld by the previous Regent, Marie-Dominique Chenu, condemned by the Holy Office in 1942. T. Philippe's creation of *L'Eau vive* explicitly elicits his desire to counterbalance the influence of Le Saulchoir, even if *L'Eau vive* is geographically close by and he himself is officially Regent of Studies at Le Saulchoir, where he had been Apostolic Visitor in 1942².

Given its intention and location, the project at once places the young institution in a strange and complex situation, fraught with immediate tensions with part of the Dominican Province of France. In 1946, T. Philippe presents the project as a “school of wisdom”. *L'Eau vive*, he writes, “actually constitutes a contemplative and missionary home; it also highlights the fact that the contemplative attitude (from an intellectual and spiritual point of view) is the best means to be totally to the forefront [...]. You understand that *L'Eau vive* may be a wonderful and quite providential means to deeply rectify the orientation of Le Saulchoir.”³

For this purpose, T. Philippe can rely on a vast network of Church and secular relationships, including rich and influential personalities.

1. Among the various interpretations of Thomism, Le Saulchoir is characterised by its will to integrate modern social sciences, especially history. This trend is often labeled relativism by the Catholic milieus more reserved towards social sciences. For a presentation of those trends, see for instance : Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté. La pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II (1914-1962)*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1998, (coll. “Anthropologiques”), 325 p.

2. On the crisis at Le Saulchoir in 1942, see Étienne Fouilloux, “L'affaire Chenu. 1937-1943”, *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, vol. 98, no. 2, 2014, pp. 261-352.

3. T. Philippe's letter to Jacques Maritain, August 14th, 1947, Archives Jacques et Raïssa Maritain (AM).

The Félix Dehau Foundation¹, managed by his cousins, aims at supporting various Church charities. Its support here consists in buying and letting for free the two properties where the home is installed. The latter is managed by Association *L'Eau vive*, directed by Dr. Herminie de Cossé-Brissac and administered by a group of lay people capable of pulling strings among the Catholic elite of the capital. Moneyed aristocrats, diplomats, political figures and ecclesiastical dignitaries are thus solicited to support the community, which soon becomes a top spiritual place for the Catholic polite society. At Church level, T. Philippe also takes advantage of the relationships built during his Roman years and his Master's degree in theology to find solid supporters and make his project known in Roman circles. Fr Suarez, the Master of Dominicans, Mgr Montini (future Pope Paul VI), Mgr Roncalli (future Pope John XXIII) and eventually Pope Pius XII are thus solicited and look favourably at the project.

This explains the rapid success of *L'Eau vive*. The number of permanent students rises from 13 in 1946 to over 60 in 1952, while Summer schools each year gather more than a hundred participants around particularly famous keynote speakers such as Jacques Maritain or Abbé Charles Journet². The recruitment is international, with students originating from more than 20 different countries.

Oriented towards contemplation, *L'Eau vive* is closely connected with several female communities, with which it forms “a small contemplative city at the doors of Paris”, a closely-knit community tied by spiritual as well as family connections, in which T. Philippe often preaches and is the spiritual director of many. The convent of the

1. Félix_Dehau is Thomas Philippe's grandfather on his mother's side. His and his wife's charitable action is linked to the first wave of social Catholicism, launched by the *Rerum novarum* encyclical of 1891: construction of a new church in Bouvines, joint foundation with the Lille Institut Catholique of the Agricultural School of Genesh (still active), management and funding of an orphans' home in Esquermes, purchase of several properties in Belgium to install religious communities expelled from France, acquisition of Church properties in France to prepare for the return of the same, foundation of a home for war orphans, support of many projects of the Dominican Province of France... The constraints relative to the management of such a fortune and such an enterprise bring Felix Dahau in 1923 to create the Fondation Félix Dahau, which will be managed by his children and grandchildren after him.

2. On the development and functioning of *L'Eau vive*, see A. Mourges, op. cit., pp. 53-147.

Dominican nuns of La Croix et la Compassion¹, installed on a property adjacent to L'Eau vive, is strongly marked by the influence of its former prioress, Mother Cécile², T. Philippe's sister. When she leaves the convent, it is only to head a new foundation, with strong ties to L'Eau vive too, in Bouvines, on the estate of her Dehau grandparents. Strong ties also exist with the Christ-Roi Carmel in Nogent-sur-Marne, where Sister Marie-Madeleine du Sacré-Coeur (Marie-Madeleine Wanbergue), the daughter of a first cousin of T. Philippe's, lives as well as Mother Thérèse de Jésus, the prioress, who, as we saw (chapter I), had become a bosom friend of Georges and Pauline Vanier. Lastly, there exist very strong ties with the Épiphanie convent, also located in the immediate vicinity of L'Eau vive. This convent belongs to the Dominican community of Notre-Dame-des-Tourelles, whose apostolical and intellectual vocation makes it the ideal partner to propose a training to the female members of L'Eau vive.

To round it all off, one must insist on a last trait characteristic of L'Eau vive: the intertwining of spiritual and family elements. A third member of the Dahau siblings is also regularly mobilised at L'Eau vive for training sessions or to provide moral support: Marie-Dominique Philippe, also a Dominican, is teaching at *Le Saulchoir* at the time (see Chapter 4, part 2). Last comes their uncle, Thomas Dehau, who federates the Philippe sibship around him and serves, as J. Vanier puts it, as “the hidden patriarch”³ of the spiritual family of L'Eau vive.

1. The connections of this convent with Le Saulchoir are ancient, since it had, in the context of the evictions, the community had moved to Kain-la-Tombe in the diocese of Tournai between 1920 and 1941 in the vicinity of the study convent. A strong tie of complementarity and collaboration is then established between the two communities, so that when the study convent returns to France in November 1939, the sisters follow and install themselves in the same parish in November 1943. One must note that for the many descendants of the Dahau family that entered it, this small conglomerate almost represents a second motherland, located only about 20 kilometers from the family fief in Bouvines.

2. Cécile Philippe (dates) had taken Holy Orders when the monastery was in Kain. Shortly before its installation in France in 1941, she becomes sub-prioress and then prioress from 1942 to 1948. From 1945 on, she actively engages in the foundation in Bouvines of the Coeur Immaculé de Marie convent, of which she becomes the first prioress.

3. J. Vanier's interview with Antoine Mourges, 2009.

This uncle of T. Philippe's on his mother's side is the eldest son of the Dehau family. Recognised by his brothers and sisters as the head of the family upon the death of their parents, he is also one of the great figures of the Dominican order in France in the first half of the 20th century. His almost total blindness at an early age prevents him from becoming a teacher. He then embarks on a discreet but efficient apostolate as a preacher in contemplative communities (especially Carmelites and Benedictines) and the spiritual counsellor of many Catholic intellectuals. Very present in the life of the Philippe family, he probably has weighed a lot in the choice made by eight of his younger sister's twelve children to take Holy Orders: three girls becoming Carmelites, one a Dominican, while four boys become Dominicans. To several of them (including Cécile, Thomas and Marie-Dominique) he also serves as “spiritual father”, i.e. receives them regularly to counsel them as regards their spiritual life and their vocational discernment.

Next to his, one must mention the indirect influence of someone he counsels, Hélène Claeys Bouuaert (1888-1959)¹, which deeply marks the one that he designated as his spiritual heir, his nephew, T. Philippe. That woman, in whom Fr Dehau recognized a mystic gifted with very profound “graces” seems to have had a vision or a premonition about L'Eau vive.

In 1950, when J. Vanier arrives at L'Eau vive, its appearance is that of a radiant and flourishing Christian center: the premises are fine, the keynote speakers are reputed, the students are numerous and the director “saintly”. This success, however, masks a somber and more secretive reality. The Holy Office's investigation of 1956 and the recent

1. She is known to have belonged to a prominent Flemish family; Father Dahau got to know her about 1910, while she was a boarder (she was about 12) at the Dominican College of Provennes (near Tournai) where he was preaching a retreat. After this retreat the young girl was said to have had a mystical experience which she told Father Dahau. He then became her spiritual director; But he sed to say that he was as much counselled by the young woman as counselling her and that, without her, he would have remained more speculative than mystic. She was suffering from a physical handicap and lived until her death in the main béguinage in Ghent. For Father Dehau, and some of his religious nephews and nieces, she was receiving graces from the Blessed Virgin Mary and Christ. She had a capital influence on the Dehau-Philippe milieu.

opening of some archives, both ecclesiastical and private¹, allow to grasp the chronology, the nature of the scale of the whole affair. During that period, the founder of L'Eau vive is developing a whole system of heterodox beliefs and practices. According to his own narrative in his *Pro Memoria* of March 1st, 1956², it all begins in 1938, when he is teaching at the Angelicum in Rome.

On several occasion, while in Rome in 1938 (*Mater mirabilis*³, St Mary's Major especially, but in St Peter's too) I received very obscure graces, which I still do not manage to identify and classify: those graces were neither lights nor consolations; although they had the same characters and the same effects as the inner graces of tranquility and union, they involved a divine embrace of the body, definitely located in the region of sexual organs and radiating from there as if from one's inside throughout the whole body and onto the spirit³.

That event of 1938, fundamental for him, thus consists in receiving "very obscure graces" that distinguish themselves by the fact that they involve the whole body and especially the "sexual organs". He then adds that, in the following months, those "graces" come back to him each time he tries to meditate but that, conscious of their oddity, he first resists them. According to him, it is only progressively that he decides, after taking counsel from Thomas Dehau, to follow the direction indicated by those "graces". He then would have experienced a mystical union with Mary "I was engulfed all night, in all my body, into a

1. What is said here is chiefly based on the Dominican Archives of the Province of France, the Generalate Archives of the Order of Preachers, the Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and J. Vanier's personal archives.

2. During his trial, T. Philippe presented and defended his "system" himself. The recording of it is to be found in the minutes of his interrogation, from January 25th to 31st and on March 1st, then in the 18-page pro-memoria dated March 1st, 1956, which he writes out to complete his oral answers. Those documents, in which he takes full responsibility and firmly defends his beliefs and practices without admitting their sinful nature, enable one to access his presentation of the facts and retrace their chronology.

3. Fresco representing the Blessed Virgin Mary before the Annunciation, which is in a chapel of the Roman convent of La Trinta dei Monti. A tradition purports that the image painted in 1844 by Pauline Perdreau, a pupil of the Dames du Sacré-Coeur, would have been baptised *Mater Admirabilis* by Pius IX two years later. Indulgences were subsequently attached to it and a feast instituted, fixed on October 20th in the liturgical calendar.

contemplation and an extreme intimacy with Her. It was like a new knowledge of Mary"¹. He says that he would then have become conscious that those graces were too exceptional to be understood and that following them meant "the end of a life which outwardly seemed fully successful and in which one's inner life and that of theologian and apostle were helping and completing each other in fine harmony". He adds that he quickly felt "totally separated inwardly from the world, his family and his friends". "From then on, he precises, Mary was occupying the whole space, at the natural as well as supernatural level".

It is hard to know to what extent one may give credit to this narrative, written by T. Philippe *a posteriori*, almost 20 years after the events, at a time of great psychological frailty and in the context of a canonical criminal trial. It is sure, however, that it refers to the version that he later on spread among his disciples. For after this initial moment of "revelation", which only implicated him, he quickly felt the urge to make others enjoy those "graces", to transform those into sexual practices and to develop the theological arguments apt to justify them. He presents this new stage in the following pages of his *Pro memoria*:

The relationships with the other people first started in a most inward way, in prayer, as very strong supernatural unions, but with the same characteristics. From the confidences received from others, it seemed to me (and I still believe it to have been so for some of them) that they had been granted the same personal graces, were asking themselves the same questions and felt the same anxieties. After that, it reciprocally seemed that God wanted exterior acts, as signs of faith and love.

Here, T. Philippe probably tries to extenuate his responsibility by putting forward that the women he had caught in his wake would have received identical "graces"². Those "graces" enable him to understand,

1. Pro memoria, March 1st, 1956. ACDF. N.B.: but for signaled exceptions, the ACDF documents refer to Thomas Philippe's file, Prot. N. 214/1952.

2. One must however ask oneself questions about the rapid "success" of T. Philippe's mystico-sexual practices as well as on their persistence over three quarters of a century. One may put forward the hypothesis that the system of beliefs and practices he proposes offers a "solution" to legitimize sexual and emotional relationships within a human group that has barely been made aware of them and perceives them through a negative and guilt-laden prism. Spiritualizing sexuality would then offer them a form of acceptable escape.

in quite a supernatural light, the significance that those parts of the body [the sexual organs], so distorted by the [original] sin (at least in our representation), and the whole domain of sexuality should have had in the 1st plan of divine wisdom and that they must have had in a novel and mysterious way in Jesus and Mary, and kept with a properly mystic significance and symbolism in the mystery of the Church.

T. Philippe thus seems to have progressively developed a system of beliefs and justifications of his sexuality that he therefore thinks compatible with the vow of chastity he has taken. He abstains in his text from precisely giving the chronology and geography of its implementation. These are known to us (probably only in parts) thanks to the various testimonies collected by the Holy Office between 1952 and 1956.

As regards places and people, the Holy Office in 1956 can map and take stock of the spread of the group formed by T. Philippe. The places concerned are the convents of contemplative Dominican nuns seen above (Étiolles and Bouvines), Carmels (the one in Nogent-sur-Marne, but also those of Boulogne-Billancourt and Figeac and, of course, the community of L'Eau vive). The members of the group are essentially nuns or young lay women seeking for a religious vocation. The Holy Office counts 33 of them, without being sure that the list is exhaustive and without being able to evaluate the degree of implication of each in all cases.

It is to be noted that the family dimension of this deviance is pointed out by the Holy Office. Mother Cécile Philippe pushed several of her nuns at Étiolles and Bouvines into the arms of her brother while having herself homosexual relationships with several of them and incestuous ones with her brother¹. There is no proof that Marie-Dominique Philippe may have played copycat in the first half of the 1950s, but he is under heavy suspicion and is blamed for lacking discernment in his spiritual

1. Without further precisions, the point is tackled on several occasions in the study sent by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The facts denounced also include “incestuous acts, scenes of homosexuality, breaching monastic enclosure, etc.” (p. 10); “Mother Cécile, who committed seriously illicit acts with her brother Thomas” (p. 47); and lastly the quotation from a report by Mgr Gérard, a Sulpician, dated August 30th, 1974, indicating that “the erotic behavior took place not only with other women, but also with his own sister”. “Rapport d’archive report. Le cas du Rev. P. T. Philippe, O.P.”, Dec. 2021, ACDF, p. 10, 31, 47 and 57.

guidance and creating a climate conducting to encouraging one of his brothers' victims, whose spiritual director he was, to keep having sex with the latter¹. As to Thomas Dehau, his role is under close scrutiny from the Holy Office. He is blamed for at least lacking discernment in his spiritual direction and creating a climate propitious to encourage his nephew in his deviances. Although the investigation in his case seems to have been less exhaustive owing to his age (he dies in October 1956, a few months after his nephew's trial has ended), the members of the Holy Office consider some much more serious accusations against him admissible. Paul Philippe, in charge of the whole affair as Holy Office Commissioner, reports that in 1956 Thomas Dehau, confronted to “canonical warning”, admitted that he too had “committed mysterious things” with several nuns, adding that his nephew “had been less prudent”². Finally, a Carmelite says in her statement of February 19th, 1956 that “R2 and R3 (an anonymity code, those are other Carmelites from the same convent) had done those things with Fr. Dehau before Fr Thomas”³.

The oldest events noted by Paul Philippe date back to 1942, i.e. at the very time of T. Philippe's installation at Le Saulchoir⁴. One must wait, however, until the end of 1950 for the first outside observers to first perceive signs of the secretly developing disorder. The first description follows a canonical visit by Mgr Pierre Brot, Vicar General of the diocese of Paris and delegate superior of the Carmel. During his visit, which takes place on November 3rd, 1950, he perceives “an anomalous infatuation for this monk [T. Philippe].”, close to “adoration”. He also remarks that Fr T. Philippe's presence is so frequent that “precautions are multiplied to hide his presence to the Community and to those outside, the ecclesiastical Superior and the Carmelite fathers, who might find it odd”⁵. But Mgr Brot is contented to write a rather severe letter to

1. On this point, see chapter 9 and the report published by the Brothers of St John.

2. Relazione pro Secreta Eminentissimorum, avril 1977, ACDF.

3. Statement of R1 (Deputy prioress of the Nogent Carmel), February 19th, 1956, ACDF.

4. “Fr Thomas started having guilty relationships with women in 1942 and his immoral life only ceased in 1952”. Note on Th. Philippe by the Holy Office Commissioner, April 16th, 1956, ACDF.

5. Report on the canonical visit of November 3rd, 1950, Mgr Pierre Brot, Vicar General of the diocese of Paris and Delegate Superior of the Carmel, ACDF.

T. Philippe and admonish the prioress, asking her to limit his visits and control them more strictly.

He has little illusion, however, as to the result of his intervention and writes: "I think an effort will be made, but I have discovered such a capacity of dissimulation that I am not sure that my intentions will not be circumvented"¹. Despite the anomalies he notices, Mgr Brot has not made out the real nature of relationships between T. Philippe and several sisters of that Carmel so far. Fr Marie-Eugène de l'Enfant Jésus (o.c.d.) was the first to bring them to light when he came to visit that particular Carmel in March 1951². This resulted in the deposition of the prioress, while Thomas Philippe saw all his powers taken off for that same Carmel by Mgr Brot³.

This first measure does not result in the sending of a description to the Holy Office. A little later, in 1951, two women members of L'Eau vive alert some Dominican of the Province of France (Frs de Menasce and Bonduelle in particular), as well as Fr Charles Journet, and begin to inform them of what they have been submitted to by T. Philippe. It was those two denunciations that led to the final removal of the monk and the opening of the procedure by the Holy Office in April 1952.

To close this presentation of *L'Eau vive*, it is important to underline the fact that, when J. Vanier joins the community in September 1950, there is no way he could guess about its dark side. He naturally looks at it as positively as his parents do and approaches T. Philippe with great confidence and sincere admiration.

From "spiritual son" to "fanatical disciple"

That J. Vanier should become one of T. Philippe's spiritual sons and somehow fall into his spiritual hold is easy to establish, for he shares the latter's intellectual tastes, devotions and praying practices. This, for instance, conspicuously emerges in a letter sent to his parents, in which he describes the "prayer on his heart", which T. Philippe cherishes:

1. Ibid.

2. Fr Marie-Eugène de l'Enfant Jésus pays this visit as Apostolic Visitor of the French Carmels.

3. Document n°15, ACDF.

I feel so strongly that He asks me to entirely hand myself over – in a more and more obscure confidence. I think He likes to keep us in this attitude of abandonment in faith – but this abandonment is so sweet, for we lean on Him, on his Heart. *He* sees the rest. We only need to see Him alone, like small children snuggled up against Him. It feels so good for a child to hide his face onto Christ's heart. If one looked toward the outside world, one might be disoriented, anxious – suffering too much –. But if one only looks at Jesus' heart – if one puts one's face against Him, everything then becomes good –, everything is so sweet, for everything is only peace and love. This is our resting place¹.

The phrase "fanatical disciple of T. Philippe" is first applied to J. Vanier on May 19th, 1956 in a "Report for the Holy Father's audience"², written in order to present the conclusions of the trial to the Pope. In 1959 he is now referred to as "T. Philippe's most fanatical disciple"³. The phrase is used whereas the Holy Office by then has no final proof of J. Vanier's implication in T. Philippe's sexual practices. Its use at that moment comes from the staunch dedication to the Dominican he has shown between 1952 and 1956 to defend him and enable L'Eau vive to continue. Acknowledging such a situation imposes to ask oneself about what led a young man from a good family to link his life so strongly to a monk who had developed a whole system of deviant beliefs and practices. This involves asking oneself about the mechanisms of T. Philippe's hold on him over that period. It seems to become effective within a very short lapse of time, between the end of 1950 and the Summer of 1952. One may distinguish two stages in the process leading to that result. At first, in a period between J. Vanier's arrival in September 1950 until T. Philippe's departure from *L'Eau vive* on April 3rd, 1952, a spiritual filiation progressively establishes itself between the two men, without J. Vanier's being introduced to the Dominican's secret beliefs and practices. A second stage, between April and September 1952, may be defined as the time during which he is initiated to the "secrets".

His life at L'Eau vive and his relationship with T. Philippe over the first period is documented by the letters he wrote to those close to him

1. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, November 12th, 1956, APJV.

2. Notes for the Holy Father's audience, May 19th, 1956, ACDF

3. Answer of the Holy Office for the Holy Father's audience of April 2nd, 1959, ACDF

at the time, a note he wrote in 2005 and various narratives to his biographers¹.

A letter sent to Tim Hollis, a former schoolmate from the cadet school, enables us to see that as soon as April 1951, eight months after his arrival, he is already deeply attached to the community and full of missionary zeal:

The peace, the real peace – interior and exterior –, the studies in philosophy and theology (if people realized how rich these are) and then the community life. You see Eau vive tries to live as the early Christian communities lived – particularly from the point of view of unity “that you may be one” –, a unity that the Gospel calls for, almost begs for. Alas Christians everywhere – and Catholics are no exception – have lost faith in the truth of the New Testament –. We have lost the sense of prayer, forgotten that “without me, you can do nothing” forgotten that all is love: *Deus caritas est* – that God is LOVE – he is the way, the truth and the life –, that the meaning of the Cross is LOVE –. Christ died out of an excess of LOVE. “God so loved the world...” Read in St John at the last supper how many times the word love is used. But Eau vive is also a very international centre – about 20 countries represented – [...] and the object and the purpose of all is that search of God – to find the LOVE – to find and then later to give –. Many come to find out about Catholicism: Muslims, Chinese, etc..²

The passage reveals that he is already deeply imbued with the spirit of the community, which he perceives as a very pure realization of the Gospel's spirit like that of the “first Christians communities”. The somewhat elated portrait he draws of the community reveals that he is mostly moved spiritually. The intellectual aspect, as to it, is only briefly referred to in the rest of the letter. The use of the lexical field of love and unity is also remarkable in this passage, as well as the reference to John's Gospel, which, as we know, will take such an importance in his life.

Without contradicting this presentation, his *a posteriori* narratives of his beginnings at L'Eau vive highlight another aspect of his life. He tells again about his elation and how dazzled he was by the spiritual life of the community, but describes himself as a somewhat off-beat and lonely

1. See especially K. Spink, op. cit, p. 399-672 et Anne-Sophie Constant, Jean Vanier. Portrait d'un homme libre, Albin Michel, Paris, 2014, p. 71-101.

2. J. Vanier's letter to Tim Hollis, April 22nd, 1951, Tim Hollis's archives.

young man among a community of nearly 60 students: “I was a loner. Maybe I had always been without many friends (with comrades, yes, but no friends). My life at L'Eau vive enhanced this aspect of a loner”¹. He also explains this feeling of solitude, which corresponds to his personality, by his experience in the Navy and his feeble philosophical and theological culture when he entered the community:

I was just out of the Navy with a virgin intelligence. I did not know anything but the Navy. I had read, I wanted to pray and I was flabbergasted by this world of intelligent people (many Arabs). They were intelligent people talking about intelligent things. Not knowing a thing in philosophy, I was a bit lost. But this did not bother me. I was living in the word, where cabins were installed and I was very well, I was reading a lot. The first thing that Father Philippe gave me to read was Father Dehau's *Fleuve d'Eau vive*, which was deeply touching me. I took advantage of it all to pray. I felt good. In collective moments, I perhaps felt a little different from the others, although I had perhaps more experience of life than they had.²

In this passage, one can also see T. Philippe's influence on him looming up. It first takes shape with readings such as that of Fr Dehau's best-known book³, which introduces J. Vanier to the spirituality of the Dehau-Philippe family.

If we oppose, on the one hand, the spiritual filiation establishing itself between T. Philippe and J. Vanier at that moment and, on the other hand, the important number of people in the community whose spiritual director or confessor T. Philippe was⁴, it is interesting to wonder if the relationship

1. J. Vanier, “ Sur la préhistoire de l'Arche ”, 2003, APJV.

2. Research interview, A. Mourges, 2009.

3. Pierre-Thomas DEHAU, *Des Fleuves d'eau vive*, Association de l'Agneau, Paris, 1983 (1e éd. Lyon, Editions de l'Abeille, 1941).

4. Several documents show that T. Philippe seems to have been the confessor or counsellor of a great many members of L'Eau vive. One can for instance quote a letter from Fr Pierre Maupin M.D., vicaire of the cathedral of Besançon, close to L'Eau vive, to Fr Avril : “ Doesn't Fr Thomas also suffer from a physical condition which I call very deficient, owing to his shaving being all at once superior, confessor of a great part of his house?”, III O 59, ADPF. J. Vanier, as to him, says: “ Fr Thomas had a kind of genius in creating and organising L'Eau vive, but he was above all the spiritual director of most people. We were queuing up in front of his door to see him and it was often late at night that I managed to meet him.” *Projet Jean Vanier sur les origines de l'Arche ”*, 2005, APJV.

then establishing itself between J. Vanier and T. Philippe was different from all others and, if this is the case, to understand the reasons why.

Several outside signs enable us to see that a privileged relationship is being established between them. In November 1950, hardly two months after J. Vanier's arrival, T. Philippe chooses him to come along to Rome on the occasion of the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption. This trip permits to underline the fact that, like many students at L'Eau vive, J. Vanier receives his Marian spirituality from T. Philippe, which explains why he later on sometimes defined himself as "a child of the Assumption"¹. J. Vanier also remembers that he drove T. Philippe "quite often to Nogent, Paris or Lille"² in his parents' car. This is also how he chauffeurs him on a trip to the south of France that leads them to the Vaniers' holiday home in Vézelay, to La Salette for a time of personal retreat for T. Philippe, to Saint-Maximin, the study convent of the Dominican Province of Toulouse, where the latter is called upon to preach the convent's retreat and at last to the Dominican nuns' convent of Les Tourelles³, in Montpellier, where he also preaches a retreat. Those trips give J. Vanier the opportunity to spend long moments with T. Philippe. It must be added that, owing to the latter's aura at the time, being chosen to accompany him in his trips is probably considered a favour in the community. What makes T. Philippe choose this young man, newly arrived in the community, rather than an older member? Possibly the fact, for one thing, that he can benefit from the use of Georges and Pauline Vanier's car. It is also likely that the social status of J. Vanier's parents, their support to L'Eau vive and the already existing spiritual links with them play a part in this predilection that the Dominican seems to have for him. Several people close to the community actually note this tendency to "collect" influential relationships and drop names⁴. Asked about it in 2009, J. Vanier points out the availability

1. The Assumption is a fundamental, almost a founding event for the members of T. Philippe's group of followers. This quotation of words by J. Vanier is to be found in K. Spink, who does not give any precise reference: "This is why, he adds, I feel so much a child of the Assumption", *op. cit.*, p. 47.

2. J. Vanier, "Sur la préhistoire de l'Arche", 2003, APJV.

3. The monastery of Les Tourelles is the Mother House of that of L'Épiphanie, located across the road from L'Eau vive.

4. In a letter to the Master of the Dominican Order dated May 22nd, 1952, Paul

offered by his vocational research as he arrived at L'Eau vive, which would not be the case of other students¹. Even if this corresponds to a proven reality, one can wonder if this remark is founded, for it is dubious that, of all the students at L'Eau vive, he should have been the only one available and in research. The answer is probably to be sought in the strength of the spiritual and emotional link that T. Philippe manages to establish with him. J. Vanier seems fascinated by the Dominican, places himself under his spiritual direction, listens to his homilies almost daily and talks and feels deeply affected by his spirituality. In August 1951 he writes to his parents that "after compline, Fr Thomas 'ends the day with words of truth and fire'"². Fifty years later, he comes back on his personal encounters with the monk:

His words were entering my heart and opening it. On hearing him and being in his presence, I was relishing the taste of God, that of loving Jesus and Mary, of following Jesus right to the end. I was feeling transformed in his presence. To me he was God's presence. I still remember today, as if it were yesterday, the talks he gave on "silence". This says how deeply Jesus used him to get into me³.

This text is symbolic of all J. Vanier has said about the birth of his link with T. Philippe. The latter is always referred to from a spiritual point of view and would almost pass for an exceptional mystical phenomenon, a grace, a presence that is felt "deep inside" and escapes formulation through words. In this experience, one can remark that T. Philippe occupies the position of a mediator between the man he counsels and Jesus, Mary, God. This passage also sheds light on J. Vanier's letter to his friend Tim Hollis, quoted earlier, and on the emotional spirituality it exudes, well in the wake of T. Philippe's own. A Dominican, Fr Jean de Menasce, provides other elements to help us understand the latter's force of attraction and personality. His commitment to L'Eau vive, his proximity with the Philippe brothers and Fr Dehau and his remarkable capacities of

Philippe thus remarks: "When one knows in what esteem Fr T. Philippe is held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in twenty-two foreign embassies in France (he had himself quoted the figure two or three years ago,)", AGOP.
1.????

2. J. Vanier's letter to his parents (date?)

3. Research Interview, A. Mourges, January 2009

analysis enable him to interpret the situation with considerable finesse. In a letter sent to Paul Philippe on May 21st, 1952, de Menasce points out that one of the causes of T. Philippe's deviance would be:

An abnormal psycho-physiological substrate: since the natural purification of the senses provided by art (even at a minimal degree) or common sense (taking characters into account) has not been completed, the sexual depths, being simply set aside by way of hyper-spirituality, without a true struggle or plain renunciation, were bound to surge up into full spirituality and interfere with it. If you have any notions of Indian tantrism, this may give you some indication of what I mean. Properly speaking, there has not been any moral life in him (I do not mean that it has only been a disposition to contemplative life, I mean that any moral life was simply abolished right from the start). Hence too the irresistible impetus that he could give to the contemplative life of others, the impression of purity he gave, but also the extraordinary pre-emption of anything moral, natural, relevant of character and his indiscriminate horror of any psychology of the unconscious akin to psycho-analysis. Such is the substrate. Some saints are like that... and they generally die young¹.

This passage, which gives clues to understand T. Philippe's psychology and deviances, also enables us to rather better grasp his force of attraction on the young men he counsels at L'Eau vive or the young Dominicans he teaches at Le Saulchoir.

Seeing the effect of this on J. Vanier in the first months of his arrival, one may wonder what he can have perceived of the secret dimension of L'Eau vive and if T. Philippe tried to introduce him to it. We know for instance that one of the first gestures he poses to initiate those he counsels to his practices is to make them "pray" with their heads against his heart "like St John at the Last Supper" with Jesus. Even if there is no evidence of any homosexual relationship between T. Philippe and those he leads, it is known that the Holy Office recorded the testimony, regarded as credible, of a woman indicating that "Jean Vanier would often pray against Fr Thomas's breast like the women the latter had initiated"², although it is not certain T. Philippe started this practice before 1952 (since the witness reports facts stretching as far as 1954).

1. Jean de Menasce's letter to Paul Philippe, May 21st, 1952, file XIII.30200 2 Prov. Francia 1938-1946, AGOP

2. Myriam Tannhof's statement, January 2nd-4th 1956, ACDF

Besides, J. Vanier, in his own account, dates his initiation to mystico-sexual practices to only when T. Philippe had left L'Eau vive.

Still, we have seen that J. Vanier's arrival at L'Eau vive coincides in time with the first warnings to and the first accusations against T. Philippe and the secret group surrounding him. The first reprimands, from Mgr Brot and then Fr Marie-Eugène de l'Enfant Jésus, occur in November 1950 and March 1951. They result in T. Philippe being sent away from the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel, whose prioress is deposed. The event is too important and conspicuous for the Vaniers and their son, connected to the Carmel as they are by the multiple links we have seen, to possibly ignore it. This is shown in a letter sent by J. Vanier to his parents a short time after the event:

I saw Elisabeth [de Miribel] for only about 5 minutes –She is suffering a lot but is in peace –She talked to me as if she knew I knew all –She asks prayers of Byngsie. She told me to go to Montmartre to see Mère Thérèse – Should I? Does she want to see me?
– Eliz. gave me a message to give Père which will make him realize I know a good deal
– I have not decided whether to give the message or not – Would it be breaking what you asked me not to do? – Write and say what you think about the two things¹.

The letter is difficult to interpret with certainty. Even if he gives the impression to "know all about it", it is hard to deduce from this passage what J. Vanier knew, or thought he knew, of the serious problems that had caused Mother Thérèse, the prioress to be deposed and T. Philippe to be excluded. But the passage at any rate enables one to see that he was not totally unaware of the existence of serious difficulties and that he, as early as April 1951, is faced to the secret aspect of L'Eau vive: he has received instructions from his parents, he is seeking their advice, etc.

By the end of this stage of discovering L'Eau vive, J. Vanier has become a fervent disciple of T. Philippe. He is not initiated yet to the latter's secret beliefs and practices, but one may consider him sufficiently prepared already to quickly adhere to them later on. Anyway, T. Philippe's choice in April 1952 to appoint J. Vanier as head of L'Eau

1. J. Vanier's letter to Pauline Vanier, March/April 1951, APJV

vive sufficiently evidences the special link existing between the two of them¹. It must be stressed that this choice totally puzzles the other protagonists and especially the Dominicans, who cannot understand how a young, inexperienced layman can find himself in a position of authority in such a crisis. One may wonder about what really urged T. Philippe to choose J. Vanier. Was their mutual confidence already so strong at that time? Was not his choice rather irrational, like several of those he made at the same period? Was he counting on the protection that Georges and Pauline Vanier might provide to their son and the community? Each of those motivations may have come into play. One may also suppose that when T. Philippe makes this choice, he does not know how his situation will evolve and still hopes that he may return quickly. During the following weeks, both his situation and that of L'Eau vive are confused and uncertain. It will take its members some time to understand that its founder will not come back.

It is in this time of crisis and confusion that J. Vanier will discover the dark face of L'Eau vive, be initiated and definitely adhere to it. The essential moment of this initiation is known thanks to J. Vanier himself, who disclosed it in three successive interviews that took place over June and July 2016. These had been brought about by the reception by the L'Arche authorities of a first testimony, that of a woman claiming to have been sexually abused by J. Vanier. The facts she described seeming close to those described by T. Philippe's victims, imposed to demand that J. Vanier explain himself. An account of his interview with Patrick Fontaine, then head of L'Arche internationally, and Stephan Posner, then head of L'Arche for France, reads:

J. Vanier mentions a woman who was frequenting L'Eau vive. It was on the feast of Corpus Christi in 1952 [Sunday, June 15th, 1952]. They were praying together that day when the woman suddenly found herself in his

1. A last passage permits to measure how strong his link to T. Philippe is in 1952. Looking back with Anne-Sophie Constant in 2013 over what led him to remain faithful to Fr T. Philippe after he was excluded from L'Eau vive in April 1952, he went so far as to say: "Betraying Fr Thomas, ditch him in the serious difficulties he would soon be confronted with would have been betraying myself. It would have been like committing suicide." Interview with Anne-Sophie Constant dated September 17th, 2013, Constant, op. cit., p.79.

arms. The following days, during which this situation was prolonged, were an acme in Jean's spiritual life. He refers to it as a founding spiritual experience, at the origin of his vocation, his choice of life, etc.¹

During this first interview, J. Vanier does not mention the woman's name, while he is very precise about the date, "founding" in his eyes and symbolic to the extent that it becomes an anniversary of their relationship² in the correspondence that they exchange and that will be analyzed in a next chapter. As J. Vanier himself admitted, those intimate relationships began on Sunday June 15th, 1952 as a consequence of a "founding" experience "at the origin of his vocation, of his choice of life". The words are so important that they each need to be carefully pondered on. In what way does L'Arche originate in the spiritual and sexual experience of that day in June 1952? In the "log book" of the crisis at L'Arche, during a second interview on June 18th, 2016 with Eileen Glass, then international deputy-head of L'Arche, what follows, in English this time, is recorded:

He referred again to the experience in 1952 and Eileen Glass asked whether the woman involved shared his understanding of what happened. He said yes, she in fact had initiated it as she had experience with Fr T. He also said that the experience was the source of life and conviction that carried him through the next ten years, leading to the foundation of L'Arche.

It was during that interview that the name of Jacqueline d'Halluin was pronounced for the first time. J. Vanier is twenty-four, Jacqueline d'Halluin twenty-six. Like T. Philippe, she is a member of a Catholic bourgeois family from the North and is a distant relative of his. Some points here deserve to be underlined. According to J. Vanier, the relationship had been freely consented, was duplicating the one between Jacqueline

1. Patrick Fontaine, "Rencontre JV ; Stephan P ; Patrick Fontaine le 2 juin 2016 à Trosly", AAI. Patrick Fontaine, "Rencontre JV ; Stephan P ; Patrick Fontaine le 2 juin 2016 à Trosly", AAI.

2. Jacqueline d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, May 31st, 1959: "I had thought on Thursday that this was Fête Dieu, but I had not realized this was the feast of Corpus Christi. But the Good Lord had not forgotten and I was all taken away by the heart graces. After I was all for thanksgiving, seeing, on receiving your letter, that it was that very day He had given himself so entirely to the two kittens and that He was keeping them in the same graces", APJV.

d'Halluin and T. Philippe and, however strange this may seem, resulted into the foundation of L'Arche.

We have two different accounts of J. Vanier's third interview, with Patrick Fontaine and Stephan Posner, dated July 5th, 2016. Jacqueline d'Halluin's name this time appears with all the required precision. Stephan Posner notes: "The interview lasted two hours. [...] He tells us that what was first sought after was an experience of communion rather than a sexual one, even if it was leading to it." Patrick Fontaine adds:

Jean says that in the experience with Jacqueline in 1952 (we shall later on in the conversation understand that this is Jacqueline d'Halluin) there was 'a balance'; it was Jacqueline who took the initiative, the spiritual communion was a strong dimension, the sexual dimension of pleasure, not really present, even if it was there.¹

To embrace the scope of this episode better, it is important to replace it in the context of the weeks following T. Philippe's departure from L'Eau vive, which takes place on April 3rd, 1952. Officially appointed as the new head of L'Eau vive, J. Vanier is informed, as early as May 1952, of the serious charges against T. Philippe. On May 18th, he writes in this sense to Fr Paul Philippe:

The Provincial Reverend Father [Fr Avril] talked to Fr Behler three days ago. He gave him the same details he gave me, adding: 'The Fr admitted sleeping with the girls'².

It is also to be noted that the first two written testimonies of witnesses supporting the canonical procedure against T. Philippe are dated June 1952.³

Dated from the very same June 15th, 1952, we have a letter sent by Fr Paul Philippe to the Master general of the Dominicans: P. Philippe obviously progresses in his comprehension of the file, as he measures the

1. Account by Patrick Fontaine, File "Cellule de crise" 2016-2019. Archives of L'Arche

2. J. Vanier's letter to Paul Philippe dated May 18th, 1952, quoted in extenso in P. Philippe's letter to Master general Suarez, May 22nd, 1952, XIII.30200/2 "Prov. Franciae 1938-1946", AGOP.

3. Testimonies of Madeleine Guérault and Madeleine Brunet, III O 59, Eau Vive, ADPF.

pathological dimension in the case of T. Philippe. "I daresay that this is the first time Fr Philippe has frightened me"¹. The latter, who threatens to commit suicide, evidences "a devastating drift towards schizophrenia and possibly *dementia praecox*"². By mid-June 1952 the crisis has reached an acme. How is the chronological coincidence between J. Vanier's sexual initiation and the procedure launched in Rome to be understood?

Two months and a half after T. Philippe's forced departure, the reasons for which are well-known of all the chief protagonists, J. Vanier has an intimate relationship with Jacqueline d'Halluin, as director and successor of T. Philippe in the latter's *absentia*. At the moment when T. Philippe is losing his psychological bearings and L'Eau vive seems more threatened than ever in its foundation, the latter is being reinforced by widening the circle of T. Philippe's bosom friends, including J. Vanier, a male, a "Christ". Did Jacqueline d'Halluin act on a spiritual or sexual impulse? Did she receive a suggestion in that direction from T. Philippe? Was it compulsive or deliberate? The archives do not allow for an answer since the correspondence between T. Philippe and Jacqueline d'Halluin have not been kept. We however know that, between April and June 1952, J. Vanier goes twice to Rome, trying to meet T. Philippe, although visits to him are theoretically forbidden. A first attempt before May 22nd comes to nothing³: J. Vanier is intercepted at the station and accepts to take the next train back to Paris. A second one, on May 30th-31st, probably prepared more discreetly, was more successful⁴, even if the wished-for secret was eventually disclosed⁵. By mid-June, the Master of the Order decides to send T. Philippe back to France. On June 23rd, driven back from Italy by J. Vanier, who went to pick him up at the border, T. Philippe arrives at the convent in Dijon and

1. Paul Philippe's letter to Master General Suarez, June 15th, 1952, XIII.30200/2 "Prov. Franciae 1938-1946", AGOP.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, beginning of June 1952, APJF.

5. P. Philippe's letter to Suarez, June 9th, 1952. AGOP. "Jean Vanier went to mass at St Sabina and seems to have lied to Paul Philippe, whose suspicion is aroused" (which was not the case in the first letter in which Vanier was still benefitting in his eyes from a capital of confidence).

is immediately taken to Citeaux Abbey. This chronology for June 1953 reveals the excitement, verging on panic, of T. Philippe's friends.

From a liturgical point of view, the date of Corpus Christi, the feast of the Body and the Blood of Christ is symbolic in a perspective worth precisising: it is the feast of the Holy Sacrament, when the real presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine is being celebrated. It is not a Marian feast, but the feast of Incarnation and of the gift of Christ to mankind in the form of the Sacred Species. When one reads the letters exchanged in 1952 between T. Philippe and J. Vanier, one cannot but evidently conclude that T. Philippe, even absent, is informed with precision of J. Vanier's participation in the "graces" and of the capital role of Jacqueline d'Halluin and Anne de Rosanbo. The latter, a former novice at the La Croix convent, subsequently joined L'Eau vive, where she was initiated by T. Philippe and became one of his most fervent disciples. The dates are lacking in the letters to precise the chronology, but their sense is clear. One can thus read this eminently significant passage in a note that can be dated from 1952:

My dearest Jean,

Just a word to assure you of my very deep union. I feel so strongly that our meetings bring us many graces, they fortify us, they bring us life [...]. M. obviously wants to use A. [Anne de Rosanbo] and J. [Jacqueline d'Halluin] for you, they are the ones that must counsel you and give you strength, they hold the place of N. [T. Philippe] near you... and I believe there is no searching for light anywhere else.¹

How exactly is this passage to be understood? Since Anne de Rosanbo and Jacqueline d'Halluin are to hold the place of T. Philippe beside J. Vanier and since the latter has intimate relationships with Jacqueline d'Halluin, must we conclude from this fragment that he had intimate relationships with T. Philippe? Are we forcing our interpretation? Whatever the case may be, the circle now closes itself on four persons in a very forceful phrase: it is no use searching for light "anywhere else".

1. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, second half of 1952, APJV.

Heading L'Eau vive

On April 3rd, 1952, T. Philippe is excluded from L'Eau vive and sent away to Rome. This decision stems from the taking into account by the prior of the province and then by the Master General of the testimonies of two women resident of L'Eau vive concerning T. Philippe. The sexual nature of the reported facts, the will to let L'Eau vive continue, the fear of scandal and the wish for discretion of the two victims mean that the reasons for his departure are never given publicly and are not at first given to the members and friends of L'Eau vive. Only those initiated to the "secret" and the Dominican authorities in charge of the case are informed at first. One must however note that over the few weeks following the departure, the conflict situation opposing the lay members of L'Eau vive to the authorities of the province of France leads the latter to inform a certain number of the protagonists of the charges against T. Philippe¹. This strategy aims at shutting up T. Philippe's champions, who see in his exclusion a maneuver by the province of France to limit his influence and get hold of L'Eau vive. Thought to have been necessary², this move has unfortunate side effects, for it triggers the proliferation of rumours that seriously inflame and obfuscate the situation³.

1. Numerous documents evidence the fact that in April and May 1952 a certain amount of "secret" information is quickly circulating at L'Eau vive, Le Saulchoir, among the Paris Dominicans, at the convents of La Croix and L'Épiphanie. But it is difficult to establish what was revealed exactly and to what extent it may have been interpreted and twisted. We may for instance quote a passage from a letter sent by T. Philippe to Fr Suarez on March 27th, 1952, which shows that information had begun to circulate even before he was excluded: "On March 19th, Fr Marie-Dominique, my brother, came to see me in a panic. He had just learned from Fr Guérard that the Prior at le Saulchoir had called a meeting of the Council to inform the Fathers in most spiteful, false and indeed abusive terms, I believe, ending: "You see the dangers of a certain spirituality". I have since learned that the Provincial Father had talked to the Le Saulchoir Prior and the latter to Fr Baron, before the Provincial Father had talked to me", XIII.30200/2 Prov. Franciae 1938-1946, AGOP.

2. In a letter of July 11th, 1952 to Fr Behler (o.p.), Fr Avril, Provincial of the Dominicans thus writes: "if a scandal breaks out, which I wish to avoid with all my strength, the responsibility will bear on those who, slandering Le Saulchoir and the Dominican Province of France and presenting Fr T. Philippe as the victim of unfair machinations, force one to restore the truth", III 0 59 "Eau vive", ADPF.

3. Fr de Menasce as for him writes to Jacques Maritain on July 1st, 1952: "It seems besides that the gossips are based on half-truths, indirect allusions, confidences requiring secret, etc. In a word, the devil does not waste any of the by-products that he can retrieve..." Archives Maritain (AM).

It also gives birth, among several close friends of T. Philippe's, to a reverse, unexpected attitude since they develop the conviction that those are slanders aimed at harming L'Eau vive and T. Philippe.

It is in this context fraught with tension and confusion that J. Vanier is appointed head of L'Eau vive by T. Philippe. This choice, which, given J. Vanier's young age and lack of ecclesial experience, is a surprise to the Dominicans of the Province of France and gives way to an open conflict which only ends with the closing down of L'Eau vive in June 1956. The conflict goes through different stages, with acute crises and moments of appeasement, the chronology and stakes of which must be presented here.

The first stage, rather brief, sees the conflict progressively emerging between April and July 1952. As we saw, the tensions are originally rising around T. Philippe's forced departure and its perception as the fruit of a machination by Le Saulchoir and the Dominican province. The progressive diffusion of the type of charges against T. Philippe among the members and some of the supporters of L'Eau vive in order to make them accept the decision does not have the expected result and a majority of them decide to remain faithful to the founder of the community against all odds. This is first the case of J. Vanier's parents. Present in Europe until the Summer of 1954¹, they unwaveringly support their son and regularly mobilize their vast network of relationships to champion L'Eau vive against the Dominican province of France. This is also the stance taken by the Board of Administration of L'Eau vive and their President, Herminie de Cossé-Brissac². The latter, coming from a high-ranking family of French aristocrats, has a huge network of relationships at her disposal and will bring her unflinching support to the community and its new director. L'Eau vive gets similar support from the members of the Fondation Félix Dehau, who are all first cousins of T. Philippe's. Since it owns two of the three properties housing L'Eau vive, the Foundation's support of the community against the Dominican Province is a weighty one.

1. Georges Vanier leaves his post as ambassador in December 1954, but he and his wife decide to stay in order to travel in Europe and visit their friends there.

2. Herminie de Cossé-Brissac (1907-1982), born Rohan-Chabot, is a pediatrician, with a diploma from Strasbourg University (1940). She is married to General Charles-Henri de Cossé-Brissac.

Georges Vanier and the L'Eau vive team may therefore rely on this group of influential people to support them. At first, they are the ones that will make the initial decisions to oppose themselves to the Dominican Province of France and defend J. Vanier's position at the head of the house. For he actually is quickly contested by Fr Avril and the provincial council, for whom L'Eau vive is a foundation of the Dominican Order which must keep its control by appointing a new chaplain-cum-director. Fr Augustin Desobry is chosen as early as April 1952. The latter being away on a trip to Israël and Lebanon, his appointment is announced to the members of L'Eau vive only on May 29th. In his letter to Fr Behler, a German Dominican, resident at L'Eau vive, Fr Avril asks him to "call a general meeting around a cup of tea or coffee that day, in order to facilitate the first contact"¹. We know from J. Vanier's later testimony that the news at once arouses Herminie de Cossé-Brissac's violent anger². Still, a long account written by Fr Desobry shows that she receives him on June 4th and avoids revealing too direct an opposition and openly refusing his appointment. Her strategy rather seems to consist in drawing such a somber picture of the situation and posing so tough conditions that the province should be brought to drop their project³. She begins by stressing that she and the members of L'Eau vive are now acquainted with "the whole affair" and think that the whole thing hinges on "odious slanders", which creates a climate of general hostility towards Le Saulchoir and the Province. She then points out that L'Eau vive is not officially affiliated to the Order and that consequently the lay people in charge of it, the societies supporting it who own the premises do not want to take the risk that its spiritual and theological orientation might be modified by an intervention of the Province, which they judge too progressive. Hence comes the fact that, according to her, the role of a chaplain appointed by the Order would be limited to the spiritual sphere, with no decision power on orientations, recruitment and organization. This attitude is inadmissible to Fr Desobry and the Province. A period of

1. Copy of Fr Avril's letter to Fr Behler, May 29, 1952. III. O 59 "Eau vive". ADPF.

2. Georges Vanier leaves his post as ambassador in December 1954, but he and his wife decide to stay in order to travel in Europe and visit their friends there.

3. "Compte rendu de la conversation du R.P. A-M. DESOBRY avec Mme de Cossé-Brissac", June 4th, 1952. III. O 59. "Eau vive". ADPF.

negotiations then starts during which the Province tries to ensure itself the material, spiritual and doctrinal control of L'Eau vive. Because the members and their supporters resist, the Province eventually decides on August 19th, 1952 to break up any relationship with them, by withdrawing all the Dominicans still present in the various homes of L'Eau vive and forbidding access to Le Saulchoir to the latter's students. At the end of the Summer of 1952, J. Vanier therefore finds himself confirmed in the role of director of a students' hall of residence that has lost access to a training center. One may note that his personal role in the conflict remained rather limited, owing to the importance of the stakes and the forces in presence on the one hand, and his feeble recognition at that moment on the other. It was truly in the next stage that he was to begin fully exercising his function as director.

The second stage, between September 1952 and October 1954, is marked by the total break of relationships between the Dominican Order, notably with the doors of Le Saulchoir closed to the students of L'Eau vive. Since it is mostly the reason why students came to L'Eau vive, the community empties itself quickly and is reduced to some thirty people. Those, women mostly, plus a few students that see L'Eau vive more as cheap accommodation than as a true training center are the faithful core of T. Philippe's followers.

J. Vanier therefore finds himself embroiled in a complex situation involving influential personalities. In his later testimonies, he has often presented himself as a young man lacking experience, even naïve, doing his best to keep L'Eau vive going¹. This explanation might impose itself as an evidence, so wide the gap seems between J. Vanier's young age and the particular character of the situation. Still, the documents available nowadays reveal a sensibly different reality. Of course, he is being penalized by his lack of experience and one might also have expected him, given his vocation, to complete his discernment elsewhere. But one can also see a real capacity as leader emerge, as well as a real obstinacy in adversity. We thus see him imposing himself as *leader* of the

1. "I knew nothing. I had never been at the centre. I had to learn everything from scratch. I was being helped by Marguerite Tournoux, Maryse Hueber, Jacqueline d'Halluin and others", "Projet: Jean Vanier sur les origines de l'Arche", 2005, APJV.

group of resisters and developing an intensive *lobbying* activity. Under his direction, L'Eau vive seems to transform itself into a pressure group, fighting for its survival and that of its founder. With the support of his father, who does not know the exact case but mobilizes his vast connection network, he thus multiplies his visits and letters to high dignitaries of the Church in France and in Rome, such as Mgr Roncali (apostolic nuncio in France and then Patriarch of Venice), Mgr Montini (close to Pius XII, then pro-Secretary of State until 1954). He also seeks to attract new supporters, new patrons that might protect L'Eau vive. He thus (without much success), approaches Mgr Renard, bishop of Versailles, in whose diocese L'Eau vive is located, then Mgr Jean Rupp¹ (1905-1983, who becomes his ecclesiastical referent in April 1953 and will grant him full support until 1956. He also gets into contact with Mgr Léon-Joseph Suenens, auxiliary bishop of Mechlen, and Veronica O'Brien, one of the latter's friends, foundress of the French branch of the Legion of Mary, with which a brief partnership is struck. On the political side, he seeks to set up an association of the Friends of L'Eau vive, with his father as president, which would gather Catholic personalities from various nationalities² anxious to support the home and its new branches in France and abroad.

From the point of view of the teachings and the spiritual dynamics, those are hard times for L'Eau vive. To try and replace the training at Le Saulchoir, the remaining students enlist individually at the Institut catholique. To make up for the departure of the Dominicans so far associated with the home, who taught the Summer school and some classes during the schoolyear, new contacts are established amounting to renewing the staff at L'Eau vive in a more conservative and traditional sense³. This enables the institution to quickly resume the organization of sessions punctually during the schoolyear and that of a Summer school in 1953. In spite of all those efforts, the community is in undeniable

1. For more information, see Fourcade Michel, "Rupp (Jean)", Dictionnaire des évêques de France, Paris, Cerf, 2010.

2. "Robert Schuman, notably, was solicited although one does not know if he accepted the offer. Setting up this association was a project which eventually aborted before the home was finally closed down in 1956.

3. On this question, see A. Mourges, op. cit., p.238-269.

decline during that second stage. The conflict with the Dominican Province has broken the links with its original milieu and tarnished its image. This is why, as early as the beginning of 1954, steps are taken to try and restore those links. What enables to resume the dialogue more easily is Fr Avril's "resignation" from his charge of Provincial in February of the same year¹. For the members of L'Eau vive, he embodied the Province's "conspiracies" and hostility against themselves and their "slandered" founder's spiritual line. He is replaced by Fr Ducatillon at the head of the Province. The latter had managed the crisis at its beginning in April 1952 while Fr Avril was absent and he is perceived by the members of the community as much more positive.

Despite this change of situation, which T. Philippe considers "providential"², it will nevertheless take over eight months for the negotiations to reach a conclusion. This time, they involve the diocese of Versailles, which more or less serves as mediator and permits to break the deadlock of the frontal opposition between the Province and L'Eau vive. The agreement is validated by the Provincial Council of the Dominicans on September 14th and by the Board of Administration of L'Eau vive on the following 4th October. The former links with Le Saulchoir are restored and the Dominican fathers are returning to L'Eau vive to give courses and teach the Summer school.

This agreement opens the last stage in the existence of L'Eau vive between October 1954 and June 1956. A renewed vitality can be observed, especially with projects of an international expansion and the dream to make it a durable and influential Church movement. This is evidenced by the project of founding prayer and reflection groups (in Canada especially) but also of opening new centers similar to the one in Soisy-sur-Seine. A first foundation is thus envisaged in Caen, where a donor offers a domain, and a second one in Fatima, where J. Vanier goes several times in the first months of 1956 and where he buys building land with money given by his parents.

1. The forced departure of Father Avril, on February 8th, 1954, is a consequence of the "worker priests" crisis.

2. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, February 1954, APJV.

Despite such apparent dynamism, the deal of the Autumn of 1954 quickly leads to new tensions. It provides for a sharing of responsibilities and tasks between three different entities: a chaplain-cum-director appointed by the bishop of Versailles (and agreed on by the Dominicans), a director of studies appointed by the Dominicans (and approved of by the bishop of Versailles) and aided by a doctrinal committee, plus a manager appointed by the Board of Administration of the L'Eau vive association.

In theory, the agreement is not very favourable to L'Eau vive and limits J. Vanier's role to that of manager. At the end of October 1954, Fulbert Cayré (1884-1971), an Assumptionist, is appointed as chaplain-cum-director, but he finds it hard to impose his authority at ground level, face to a community that remains largely devoted to T. Philippe and his appointed successor. In practice, J. Vanier remains the boss, which quickly leads to new tensions. These eventually become particularly serious, as evidenced by a letter from Fr de Menasce to Fr Ducatillon in July 1955:

He [Fr Cayré] rightfully accuses J. Vanier to be the one who actually decides on the admissions of young men at L'Eau vive although he simply is the manager. But Vanier's moral position is stronger than Fr Cayré's and, despite the regulations, things will continue the same way¹.

At ground level, the balance of power thus remains favourable to J. Vanier and the women of L'Eau vive. But the persistence of this situation, in which the community of L'Eau vive remains faithful to its founder, will eventually backfire on them. For it is this attitude that determines the Holy Office to impose the immediate departure of J. Vanier and the group of women surrounding him. The decision is part of the measures taken at the end of T. Philippe's trial. We know of it through a letter dated May 28th, 1956 from Cardinal Pizzardo, secretary of the Holy Office, the object of which is to inform and mandate Fr Ducatillon to apply the measures concerning the different communities and persons implied in T. Philippe's practices². As regards L'Eau vive, the principal measure consists in the dismissal of J. Vanier and of the

1. Fr de Menasce's letter to Fr Ducatillon, July 4th, 1955. III O 59 "Eau vive". ADPF.

2. Cardinal Pizzardo's official letter to Fr Ducatillon, May 28, 1956, III O 59. "Eau vive" 2 "L'Affaire". ADPF.

group of women that carry the project with him, with a definite interdiction to try and gather the same group again or found a new Eau vive anywhere else. So, despite the absence of evidence that J. Vanier was implied in his spiritual father's abuses, his stubborn attachment to T. Philippe makes him a suspect and makes everyone at L'Eau vive realise that no solution will be found as long as he stays there.

Helping Thomas Philippe : up to what?

In spite of his Order's instructions forbidding him from any relationships with L'Eau vive and its members, T Philippe, from the different places where he is held in secrecy, actually remains the latter's reference and continues to influence its action and orientations through sustained exchanges of letters and direct encounters. Fr Avril had forbidden any exchange between T. Philippe and L'Eau vive as of June 1952 and had asked for the latter's mail to be monitored, but secret exchanges take place throughout the period. J. Vanier and his master quickly become experts in the art of secrecy and dissimulation. T. Philippe thus manages to send 64 letters to J. Vanier between April 1952 and 1956¹. As to the secret meetings, one will see that they are frequent, depending on how far away from L'Eau vive T. Philippe is, and on the degree of his surveillance in the various places where he is successively placed by his superiors.

The evolution of his attitude and influence largely stem from the way his case is being followed by his order and the Holy Office. It is therefore necessary to present the three main stages in it.

A first stage goes from his departure from L'Eau vive on April 2nd, 1954 to his return in France, at the Citeaux Trappe, on the following June 14th. In between the two he stays at Saint-Sabina, the seat of the Dominican Order in Rome. The great confusion prevailing at the beginning of that stage has already been indicated at the beginning of this chapter. This is the time when T. Philippe's superiors are getting acquainted with the accusations against him and are beginning to

1. T. Philippe's letters to J. Vanier between 1952 and 1964 are one of the essential materials on which this work is based. A more detailed presentation is to be found further on in chapter 1 of the 2nd part

discover the situation. Fr Suarez, Master General of the Order then asks Fr Paul Philippe, who had been close to T. Philippe for many years, to keep an eye on him. At that stage, T. Philippe admits his having had sexual relationships with the two women denouncing him and begins to justify this to several officials of the Order that know him well (Frs Garrigou-Lagrange, Browne, Paul Philippe, Gagnebet), using theological arguments. Realizing how serious the whole matter is, Fr Suarez then decides to forward the case to the Holy Office as early as April 5th. In the following weeks, T. Philippe, getting on with his defense, threatens to ask to be reduced to the lay state and puts forward the idea that, if things go on, he is fearing for his mental health. He thus obtains to be sent back to France. It must be stressed that, at that moment, his superiors and the Holy Office are still far from measuring the full scope and gravity of the situation¹. As to J. Vanier, we saw that the period corresponded for him to the time of his initiation, which took place on June 15th, 1952 only, to T. Philippe's mystico-sexual practices. It has already been indicated that he went to Rome twice, on May 22nd and 30th, each time trying to see T. Philippe despite his being forbidden to.

According to Fr Paul Philippe, he tries, during those visits, to defend his spiritual father:

In May 1952, J. Vanier came to Rome to defend Fr Thomas before Fr Suarez, Master General of the Order of Preachers, and myself [...]. I don't know what he said to Fr Suarez, but I do remember that with me he stubbornly maintained that Fr Thomas was a religious saint, slandered by his brothers, who did not forgive his being appointed Rector at Le Saulchoir, to replace Fr Chenu, dismissed by the Holy Office in 1942. All my efforts to convince J. Vanier were in vain².

1. Some twenty years later, in 1977, Paul Philippe will be asked to give his opinion on a new application for ordination by J. Vanier. He therefore takes back the file, musters his memories and writes out a long synthesis. He writes in it that in the Spring of 1952, "Neither the Father general nor myself yet fully knew the gravity and scope of the immoral relationships and "mystic" aberrations of Fr T. Philippe: the whole truth was only discovered at the trial held by the Holy Office in 1956." "Ordination sacerdotale de M. Jean Vanier. Votum du cardinal Paul Philippe". March 9, 1977. Doc. 299 B. ACDF.
2. "L'ordination sacerdotale de M. Jean Vanier. Votum du cardinal Paul Philippe", March 9th, 1977, Doc. 299 B, ACDF.

Still ignorant of the heart of the matter in May 1952, J. Vanier is not capable to take in the actual facts and therefore forcefully maintains T. Philippe's innocence. This attitude is shared by other members of L'Eau vive, who are also coming to Rome to plead the cause of the Dominican. It is only some time later, when he himself has been initiated (on June 15th, 1952), that he can become aware of the reality of the facts, but from now on considers them justified by exceptional graces¹. The women initiated by T. Philippe can then tutor him as to the required attitude. This is what one of them, Myriam Tannhof, reports in the statement she gave to the Holy Office in January 1956:

Anne de Rozambo [sic] was charged by Fr Thomas to get J. Vanier acquainted little by little for he had made big blunders during his trip to Rome by denying everything to you, Fr [Paul Philippe]. The best was to say that the Fr [Thomas] was insane, which is what Fr Thomas told me when I saw him again while he was staying in Compiègne.²

So, perhaps on T. Philippe's orders, J. Vanier is invited by the others in the know to adopt a different public attitude, by no longer denying the facts but explaining them by a psychological disorder. This stance inaugurates what the official attitude of the members of L'Eau vive will be in the period between July 1952 and October 1955.

For T. Philippe and his disciples, this second stage is a time of waiting. Using the argument of a passing psychological frailty, the Dominican begs for some necessary rest in a friendly milieu. He also abandons his attitude of self-justification and from now on remains silent about the charges against him. He thus wants to show apparent submission and perhaps avoid attracting his superiors' attention on the numerous events that they are not yet acquainted with. During those three years and a half, he is going to reside in several different places. In June 1952 he spends a few weeks in Citeaux, before going to the Sept-Fons Trappe, where he

1. He will come back much later on that period, saying: "He had been denounced by some persons for being too close in prayer to some women. At the beginning, I thought this was pure slander. Later on, there were facts. So it was not only a fabrication. The slander was in the interpretation. I believe that many things were woven out around it all." "Interview de J. Vanier en octobre 1994", p. 4, APJV.

2. Statement by Myriam Tannhof, January 2nd-4th, 1956, completed on February 16th, doc. 22, ACDF.

stays from July to December. That same month, he installs himself at the school-hamlet of Longueil-Annel, an educational centre for teenagers in difficulty. The director of the place is Dr. Préaut, an agnostic psychiatrist close to Dr. Thompson, another psychiatrist who is a resident at L'Eau vive and a staunch supporter of T. Philippe's¹. In that village near Compiègne, T. Philippe benefits from Dr. Préaut's benevolence with less surveillance by his superiors. He then is sent to the Dominican convent of Corbara in Corsica, where he stays until September 1954. At that date he gets permission to return to Longueil-Annel, where he stays until December 1955.

With T. Philippe now residing in France, it is easier for his followers of L'Eau vive to secretly meet him. Several letters from him to J. Vanier and several statements of victims to the Holy Office actually vouch for the regularity of those meetings and the strategies employed to organize them. The meetings are less frequent, however, when T. Philippe is staying in monasteries or convents. Only one is recorded in 1952, when J. Vanier and Norbert Tannhof go to Sept-Fons, then two in July and September 1954 while he is at Corbara. These times, J. Vanier is accompanied by Dr. Thompson and then by a Canadian student of L'Eau vive². But it is mostly during the two years Thomas Philippe spends at Longueil-Annel that the visits can be frequent and regular. This is what Myriam Tannhof indicates in her statement to the Holy Office:

After his removal from L'Eau vive in 1952 and his departure for Rome in 1956, Fr T. Philippe continued to meet some of the "initiated" women. J. Vanier knew it and he even helped them go to him. I know – she added while testifying at the trial – that he [J. Vanier] often saw Anne [de Rozambo] and Jacqueline [d'Halluin, another "initiated" woman] while the Fr was in Compiègne. He sold his Citroën sedan and bought a closed van, in which the Father and Anne could hide.³

1. Doctors Thompson and Préaut occupy an essential place in the itinerary that leads to the foundation of L'Arche and will be dealt with in chapter 5 of the second part.

2. Those visits are referred to by J. Vanier in his letters to his parents of early July and September 25th, 1954. APJV.

3. "L'ordination sacerdotale de M. Jean Vanier. Votum du cardinal Paul Philippe", March 9, 1977 B. ACDF.

Aided and abetted by J. Vanier, T. Philippe can thus continue his mystico-sexual practices with the women remaining faithful to him. In complete duplicity, however, J. Vanier and the members of L'Eau vive publicly display a drastically different attitude, aiming at dissociating the community from its founder. This is what they say in a "justification report" written in the Spring of 1954 in the context of the negotiations with the diocese of Versailles and the Dominican Province:

From the beginning, the officials of L'Eau vive have dissociated the case of Fr T. Philippe from that of the institution. What Fr T. Philippe may have done privately as a man has nothing to do with the institution. Only Fr T. Philippe's superiors are entitled to judge him and remove him from the institution. The L'Eau vive officials have never asked for his return.¹

Their strategy aims at protecting the institution from the accusations against its founder in a classical effort to separate the man from his work. They prolong their argument by pointing out that "the doctrine taught by Fr Philippe has always been the most traditional and that his outside action has only served to edify those that approached him"². They thus make a distinction between Fr T. Philippe's public teachings, irreproachable according to them, and his private teachings which, according to them again, would not concern L'Eau vive.

They also put forward an image of obedient lay people, humbled by the lights provided by the hierarchy and the ministry, whereas they declare themselves incapable of judging the facts kept as charges against T. Philippe. The gravity of the charges against him is so evident that the argument is risqué. For the hierarchy, the most common moral sense imposes to condemn the facts, so that any "neutral" attitude is inevitably suspicious. All the more so when the arguments are put forward by people intimately linked with T. Philippe and most of them suspected of complicity.

Their adopting such an ambiguous and risqué attitude can also be explained by the lack of action on the part of the Holy Office and the Order during that second stage. This is what the author of the "archival

1. "Rapport justificatif des dirigeants laïcs de l'E. V.", April 1954, III O 59 Eau vive 2, "L'affaire", ADPF. This 71-page document is written by the officials in charge of L'Eau vive to defend their attitude since April 1952.

2. Ibid.

report" requested by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, indicates. Upon a close analysis of the file, he can state that "despite clear and corresponding statements and although Fr T. Philippe had, at least partially, admitted the facts denounced, the Holy Office took no step between June 1952 and October 1955"¹. A simple chronological and numerical analysis of the recorded documents enables to confirm that the file remained unprocessed between June 1952 and October 1955. There are thus only about fifteen documents to be found in it for that period, against more than a hundred between November 1955 and August 1956. They show that the most part of the investigation and trial is completed in just a few months. To explain this long period of inactivity, the author of the report suggests a whole set of circumstances: the age and frail health of the Holy Office Commissioner, Fr Cristoforo Brigazzi o.p., the crisis among French Dominicans, the forced resignation of three Provincials in February 1954 and at last the accidental death on June 30th, 1954 of the Master General, Fr Suarez, followed by a long period of vacant authority until Michael Browne's election in 1955. According to him, all those elements "slowed down the processing of the files and allowed the case to be burrowed into silence". So much so that by the Autumn of 1954, it seems on the verge of being closed upon relatively mild sanctions. It was notably what the new Master of the Order suggested in a note on the case dated October 29th, 1955:

As for me, I think that Fr Thomas must from now on devote himself to his prayers, write (under censorship), maybe teach a bit of dogma and history but must neither confess nor guide the souls. His correspondence must be monitored. For all of this, no intervention of the H.O. is necessary.²

Even if we do not know what J. Vanier and the members of L'Eau vive understand of the long pause in the procedure, it is evident that it represents a positive signal, which enables them to hope for a favourable denouement of the situation and lets us better understand the positions they defend face to the Province of France.

1. "Rapport d'archives. Le cas du Rév. P. Thomas Philippe, O.P.", December 2021, ACDF.

2. Doc. 30, Note on a letter from F. Thomas Philippe of October 29th, 1955, P. Michael Browne, ACDF

Only two weeks after that note was written, however, a statement by Fr Guérard des Lauriers, o.p. on November 14th, 1955 relaunched the affair, opening its third and last stage. From now on Fr Paul Philippe, appointed Commissioner of the Holy office on May 30th, 1955, is personally in charge and will act with an energy, intelligence and finesse that strongly contrast with the delays of the previous period. He receives the testimony of Fr Guérard des Lauriers. The latter, a teacher at Le Saulchoir, could not be taxed with hostility towards T. Philippe, whom he had supported during his regency at Le Saulchoir and whose spiritual sensitivity and theological orientations he was vastly sharing. He did not directly witness the events he reports, which he learnt from Myriam Tannhof. Being well acquainted with the milieu of L'Eau vive and with T. Philippe's links with the convents and carmels already mentioned, he has been able to check the facts before he came to report them. It was him that gave Paul Philippe a first spine-chilling account of the gravity of the events and the exact range of people and places that T. Philippe was connected with in his abuses (those described in the first part of this chapter) urging him to resume the investigation and systematically collect testimonies and documents. Paul Philippe thus goes to France in December 1954 and listens at length to the two women who gave a statement in 1952¹ but also to Myriam and Norbert Tannhof, whose statements will prove decisive. Myriam Chemla, a young French Jewess and Norbert Tannhof, a young German, had both been guided by T. Philippe, who had married them in 1951. Myriam had been drawn into the latter's abuses and had been prominent in the first circle of the women he had "initiated" until the beginning of 1954. At that moment, at a date and in circumstances that remain obscure, she decides to denounce the sexual abuse she has suffered. Her awareness may have been caused by her husband's discovery of the facts, of which he had so far remained ignorant. From that instant they both turn back against T. Philippe and L'Eau vive, going so far as to give a statement to the Holy Office. Beside the elements we have already presented about the

1. Following this visit, he writes to Fr Ducatillon on January 12th 1956: "Thanks to your information, I was able to meet the people concerned. More than thirty hours altogether? The affair seems to me to extend much farther than I suspect. Much more serious too than the first statements revealed. God have mercy." III 59 2. ADPF.

scope and the exact nature of the facts, they also inform Guérard des Lauriers and Paul Philippe of one of the most serious crimes in the Church's view and according to the legislation of the time, committed by T. Philippe and some of the women he had "initiated": an abortion, to which, oddly enough, a "mystic" sense was imparted. The aborted baby was the fruit of the sexual relationships between T. Philippe and Anne de Rosanbo. This is the only documented case of T. Philippe's sexual practice involving vaginal penetration and resulting in procreation. Guérard des Lauriers is the first to mention it in his statement:

There was a baby born from the latter [Anne de Rosanbo], it was a girl [sic]¹. Father Thomas was terrified, helpless. For he believed that, owing to the nature of what She had secretly revealed him, the Most Holy Virgin would prevent any conception. Arrangements were made for the child to be born dead.²

Three months later, Mother Thérèse, the former prioress of the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel confirms the facts and acknowledges her implication while questioned by Paul Philippe on February 19th, 1956:

It was my fault of the abortion took place for it was I who told the Father to call Simone Leuret to avoid a scandal at L'Eau vive if it should be discovered that Anne de Rosanbo was with child. The Father was totally confused and sobbing. Dr Leuret came with the instruments. She has since often told me that she had believed she had been doing well for the glory of the Most Holy Virgin and I do believe that she does not understand to this day that she did wrong, although she told me that she did know that this might entail a condemnation by a tribunal.³

More details are given by Guérard des Lauriers as to the "mystic" sense imparted to that abortion, since he indicates that all the women "initiated" have been asked to venerate the dead child as something sacred, because of the Most Holy Virgin's secret⁴. This is confirmed by

1. The [sic] mention seems to have been added here by the author of the report. It would send back to an error as to the child's sex. A bit later on in the report, he actually indicates that it was a boy who would even have been given the name of Jean-Marie.

2. "Déposition formelle du P. Guérard des Lauriers, O.P., Professeur au Saulchoir, contre le P. Thomas Philippe, Rome", November 14th, 1955, doc. 24, ACDF.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

a handwritten note of 1956 in the archives of the Dominican province of France, indicating that the abortion took place on September 8th, 1947 and specifies in point form that the baby – who was not alive, was baptized – kept as a relic and buried in the woods in April 1952, at the time of Fr Avril's visit"¹.

The event was thus imbued with a symbolic dimension. Its date first vouchsafes it: September 8th corresponds to the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin. There is also the fact that the fetus, born dead, was kept as a relic. It must then be pointed out that this abortion was known to only a few of the women "initiated" by T. Philippe and that nothing in the sources indicates that J. Vanier was informed. It is not unlikely that T. Philippe may have meant to hide the event from him, since it had taken place three years before his arrival.

In just a few months' time, Paul Philippe thus collects numerous testimonies and documents that overwhelmingly highlight the gravity of the whole affair. This now makes a trial inevitable in front of the Holy Office. As early as December 1955, T. Philippe is displaced from Longueil-Annel to Barra, near Naples to isolate him from the members of L'Eau vive and prepare his trial, the different stages of which ultimately take place in Rome between January 25th and May 2nd, 1956. On that date, the final decision is taken by the cardinals serving in the Holy office. He is convicted of serious sexual abuse of adult women implying the Sacrament of Penance, of false mysticism in justification of such actions and of causing an abortion. This entailed condemnation is deposition, one of the heaviest penalties provided by the Code of Canon Law

1. " Monographie ", 1956, III O 59 2, " Eau vive, l'affaire ", ADPF. This is a 27-page compilation of handwritten notes. The first eight pages bear the header of the Dominican Generalate in Rome (Saint-Sabina). It is not dated but reports events until June 1956. It seems to have been written at the time when the measures taken by the Holy Office (end of May – beginning of June 1956) were taken, maybe to serve as memo about the different persons implicated that were to be met.

of 1917¹. It deprives T. Philippe from his capacity to exercise any form of ministry, public or private, i.e. the celebration of sacraments, spiritual counseling, preaching...

That the facts have been established also causes the members of the Holy office and Dominican authorities to become aware of the problem posed by L'Eau vive and the persistent support of T. Philippe by J. Vanier and its other members. This brings about the dispersion of the group already mentioned and signifies the failure of their strategy of dissociating the future of the institution from the fate of its founder.

1. The code of Canon Law of 1917, current at the time, defines deposition in canon 2303: "Deposition, with due regard for the obligations taken up in ordination and clerical privileges, includes both suspension from office and incapacity for any office, dignity, benefice, pension, or duties in the Church, and even the privation of those things that the defendant has, although they were the title of the one ordained. To well understand the importance of the sanction, the way Canon Law defines the so-called "suspension from "office", one must refer to canon 2279: "Simple suspension from office, with no limitations being added, forbids every act, whether of the power of orders and jurisdiction, or even merely of administration, of the involved office, except for the administration of the goods of one's own benefice." To simplify, the power of order may be defined as the powers that the priest receives from his ordination, the most important of which is that of delivering sacraments. The power of jurisdiction rests in the authority that those sacred powers give him to counsel and guide persons placed under his jurisdiction. By being deposited, T. Philippe thus finds himself suspended, which actually deprives him from the right to exercise any ministry and deliver any sacrament. But "it maintains the obligations and the clerical privileges resulting from his ordination, that is to say that the ordination is not annulled. T. Philippe remains an ordained monk, so to speak, but loses all his visible functions, since he cannot serve as shepherd of God's people. The sentence therefore is heavy. The 1917 Code provides for only two heavier penalties: the perpetual deprivation of the clerical garb and degradation (which entails the reduction to the lay state).

CHAPTER 3.
Almost-priest and prophet

Antoine Mourges

J. Vanier's itinerary toward the priesthood, the beginning of which was described in chapters 1 and 2, is well followed by his biographers: its start would be in 1949-1950 to finally end in 1959 after a papal audience with Pope John XXIII, in which his parents intervene to try and allow him to be ordained quickly while having the sanctions against T. Philippe softened. His biographers also indicate that in June 1956, at the moment when T. Philippe and the network of his disciples are struck by canonical sanctions, J. Vanier's ordination is about to take place. They underline the fact that if he definitely gives up becoming a priest, it is to remain faithful to T. Philippe, a "saintly priest" wrongly condemned, without really questioning such a radical and surprising choice¹.

In its numerous omissions, the narrative built up by J. Vanier offers a truncated version of his vocational itinerary, which does not end in 1959. Thanks to the documents transmitted by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, we now know that J. Vanier is still trying to achieve his project in 1977. What seemed to be a passing stage in his youth actually occupies his mind for over 25 years. What lead him to omit providing his biographers with those elements? It is for the most part the culture of secrecy developed by the group of those in the know at L'Eau vive, as well as the pain inflicted by the Holy See's refusal.

1. See for instance K. Spink op. cit., p. 50-57 and A.-S. Constant, op. cit., p.87-95.

For, as we will see, the vagaries of his vocational itinerary, as well as its end in 1977, can only be understood in keeping with T. Philippe's situation from 1952 onward.

The importance of this thwarted, and eventually prevented, desire to become a priest has so far been underestimated. The documents collected during the investigation now permit to size it up and lead to revisiting some of the choices J. Vanier made about himself, about L'Eau vive and about L'Arche. The first of those questions, the most important one, is about the consequences of J. Vanier's dependence on T. Philippe, his conception of the priesthood and more broadly of his link to the Catholic Church. Through the hold he has on him, the Dominican induces in him an ambiguous conception of the Church. A second interrogation is about the place this itinerary toward the priesthood may have occupied in the way J. Vanier conceived of his role with those around him. How far could his legitimacy as "spiritual witness" build itself by banking on some characteristic elements of the priestly function? One can also wonder whether the obstacles met with by his desire to be ordained have not moved him to develop a personal charisma of the "prophetic" type.

From priest for the Church to priest for L'Eau vive (September 1950-June 1956)

In September 1950, J. Vanier arrives at L'Eau vive with a view to discerning the precise form of his vocation. We have little information on what he imagines at the time and no documents contemporary of the evolution of his reflection between his arrival at L'Eau vive and T. Philippe's departure in April 1952. The two testimonies we have are posterior. The first is in a letter to his parents of December 8th, 1955. Looking back over his itinerary, he writes:

I had left the Navy to join a contemplative order, but upon the advice of my director (at the time Father Daly, s.j.) I first came to l'E.V. for a year of study and readaptation¹.

1. J. Vanier's letter to G. and P. Vanier, December 8th 1955, APJ

He indicates that, perhaps following the example of his elder brother, Benedict, his first impulsion is toward a contemplative order. In his 2003 text on "The Prehistory of L'Arche", he reports an attempt to test his choice: "In February 1951, I spent ten days among the Carthusians of La Valsainte in Switzerland"¹. He comes back convinced that this is not the place for him.

He thus seems to put aside the idea of a monastic life, but we do not know which way he looks after that. We only know that he chooses to remain at L'Eau vive, probably because of the intensification of his relationships with T. Philippe. After the latter's departure, J. Vanier occupies a central position by being in charge of managing the home in a conflictual situation. As we saw, this was also the time of his initiation. It is in this novel situation that he now questions himself on his priestly vocation. His initiation notably imposes him to develop a new interpretation grid of his vocational itinerary, by making a distinction between the public and the secret plans. From the public point of view, his personal vocation now seems to blend into the more collective one of L'Eau vive. On the secret plan, his "fanatical" adhering to a corpus of mystico-sexual beliefs and practices becomes the motor, invisible from the outside, of his vocation and of "the gift of his person to Jesus and Mary".

As the private and secret plan plays a decisive role, this is where the analysis must begin. We saw that after his initiation on June 15th, 1952, J. Vanier enters the innermost circle of T. Philippe's disciples, the latter inciting him not to "seek light anywhere else". It is in this small circle that he assimilates and interiorizes the beliefs of the group with increasing intensity. His secret correspondence with T. Philippe reveals that this initiation process is on a collision course with his vocational itinerary before it totally overwhelms him.

In the first letter that T. Philippe sends him after leaving L'Eau vive, and even before his actual initiation, he thus states that:

The Holy Virgin has shown me many things for you. She wants to more and more let you into her privacy. She will perhaps also request many sacrifices; but her love will triumph of everything; and be sure that what She reserves you comes from a privileged love."²

1. J. Vanier, "Sur la Préhistoire de L'Arche", 2003, p. 9, APJV.

2. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, end of May 1952, APJV.

The master also wants to arm his disciple mentally and spiritually against mounting adversity. He bases his words on the promise that he will constantly repeat in the years to come, of a “privileged love” particular to the Virgin, which is the counterpart of the mission she assigns J. Vanier and of the sacrifices requested from him. A few weeks later, similar words are used again, to state that Mary wants:

to let you more and more enter her privacy. She takes you more and more for Herself and makes me understand that She has drawn you along into [Her] immense mystery, which, from the outside, may shock, but which, in my innermost self, in the melting pot of sufferings, humiliations...

A little further down, T. Philippe specifies what the new role of J. Vanier at L'Eau vive and with its members must be. He thus asks him: “Confirm in the faith those who confide in you”, and to “try and make L'Eau vive as it is at present follow his line as much as possible”¹. Since we do not have the young man's answers to those letters, we must remain prudent as to the way those statements sink into him. Still, his actions and choices in the following years show that he eventually totally adhered to them and that, after a few months, the mission that Mary would entrust him with through T. Philippe's mediation becomes his vocation in his eyes. In this process a decisive moment perhaps occurs as early as 1952. It is known through another letter from T. Philippe to J. Vanier, dated September 8th, 1952, following the visit paid to him at the Sept-Fons Trappe. The mystic role currently assigned to J. Vanier is mentioned in it, in connection with a woman of L'Eau vive whose identity remains uncertain, but who most likely is Jacqueline d'Halluin²:

“For the nativity of the Holy Virgin, N. [= T. Philippe] felt that it was providential that J. [= J. Vanier] and JXX came a little like the consummation of the graces they have received, of which that night will be the symbol, that a new stage will now start between JXX and J. That JXX must be guarded by

1. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, end May 1952, APJV
 2. The woman is designed by the following letters: . The first letter is definitely a “J” by comparison with other passages from T. Philippe's handwriting. The second might be an “H”, perhaps followed by an “I”. The whole, hidden in the JXX might well design J. d'Halluin. The code system subsequently developed is not in place yet. Only “N”, designing T. Philippe, is for certain.

J. as St John was guarding M. [= Marie] not only as for prudence but perhaps especially, p-c-q [= because] he is the b-l [= beloved] son, out of respect for the love [or the union] of N. and JXX. That J. and JXX are the latest-born of N. (1) [footnote below: (1) “born at the same time”] his little ones, his last-born. That N. giving JXX the gift of love and speech to J. That now N. had no more ministry, that J. was the only son, that even when he saw Fr. M.-Do. Or others he did not feel that he could give to them. That a strong distinction must be made between the prophets and the apostles. There are no more prophets like in the N.T. but there may be all sorts of prophets through private revelations. Those may play the role of prophets. N. too is a prophet. Prophets have entirely private and hidden lives, apostles have public lives. [...] Now N. as prophet will be hidden, he will no more minister to others, he will no longer be boss. Especially since R. [= Rome] N. has received many of a boss's qualities of graces but he cannot use them, J. is the one to use them. [...] J. is now the warden of JXX, he must keep N.'s little bride. J. has the duty on JXX, but out of delicacy for N. who was separated from everything, far from JXX, he gave [illegible word] that the union will be all the stronger between JXX and J. as he should benefit inwardly from those graces from M. and be revived by them¹.

The letter uses a complex system of analogies impossible to reconcile among themselves:

N.	Thomas Philippe	Prophet	Bridegroom	Father	Christ	The invisible authority “the boss's graces”	Hidden Life
J.	J. Vanier	Apostle	Warden Bridegroom By proxy	“Last-born” “Only son”	St John	Speech “guard the Little bride”	Public life
JXX	Jacqueline D'Halluin (?)	Apostle	Apostle	“Lats-born”	St Mary	Love	Public life

T. Philippe's discourse, fantastical as it is, is significant of the way he reconstructs the vision that he has of his prophetic mission and of the role of his group of disciples. It also indicates that from now on this little family enters a “hidden life”² by sharing the private life one would

1. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, Monday 8th Tuesday 9th September 1952, APJV
 2. which he most probably borrows from Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort who uses the term several times in his *Traité de la Vraie Dévotion*.

have with Mary and St John, in which it is possible to remain united and keep living together “spiritually” albeit separated. According to him, this “small family” was formed by Mary to gather the apostles of later times, the ultimate congregation announced by Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (of whom T. Philippe is a posthumous disciple) at the beginning of the 18th century and by Mélanie Calvat, the shepherdess of La Salette in the middle of the 19th.

This congregation will not be like the new c.: mission de P. [Paris] which are founded almost thinking that the Church is beginning, that this is a new stage for the C. The new congregation must be quickly founded to prepare for the coming of M., the end of the world. Those are apostles, even the last apostles [illegible words] + inflamed with love, it will be like a scion of the O. of St Dom. (the stress is especially laid on the truth, less on love). The stress must now be laid on love, the Hol. V. is in a hurry. But the apo. must be very discreet, not speak [three words illegible] or accused to be illuminists”.¹

As one discovers the eschatological accents of this letter, it must be reminded that, following his removal from L’Eau vive, T. Philippe is at that moment in a period of severe anxiety. These circumstances partly explain his use of extreme spiritualism and of arguments that are in many aspects redolent of mystical delirium. The passage also reveals the role assigned to J. Vanier and the “mystic” responsibility that the latter seems to largely endorse. Henceforth, this secret vocation will condition his choices in terms of public life.

In public terms, the trace of his vocation is first evidenced by his choice of remaining in charge of L’Eau vive in spite of everything that should prevent him from doing so: his lack of experience, his life yet to build and the extreme gravity of the situation. At the same time, he affirms his conviction to the people around that he is called to a priestly vocation. This choice, in direct continuity with the one he made in 1950 fits in perfectly with the secret mission he is entrusted with. It must be pointed out that, for him, the beliefs he is developing, despite their evident heterodoxy, are destined to the Church, which will eventually admit them. For J. Vanier, the public manifestation of his priestly

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, Monday 8th-Tuesday 9th September 1952, APJV.

vocation is also a way to reassure those around him and provide himself a coverage. T. Philippe actually writes to him in that sense at the end of 1952: “As to your mother, be prudent in your relationships with Pi [Anne de Rosambo] and Pa [Jacqueline d’Halluin]; and do impress on her that you are pursuing your studies towards priesthood and that your vocation is stronger than ever”¹.

In the two years that follow, however, that vocation remains “soilless”, without any firm project of incorporation to a diocese or order, although this is an indispensable condition. Only the studies he follows show his persistent desire. In the letters received from T. Philippe and in those he writes to his parents, the subject does not transpire until September 1954. Its being put on hold is partly explained by the fact that his theological studies are not advanced enough. It is only in September 1954, as his second year of theology starts at Le Saulchoir that he begins to envisage his ordination. This is the moment when an agreement between the diocese of Versailles, the Dominican Province and L’Eau vive is reached, enabling to normalize the ecclesial situation of the community and to renew the connection with Le Saulchoir and the Dominican Order.

According to J. Vanier, it is this incipient détente that brings him to approach Mgr Roy, the archbishop of Quebec, supported by his family and friends, with a view to being ordained and incardinated in that diocese². From the Autumn of 1954 on, exchanges of letters with the Canadian prelate inaugurate a long phase of negotiations. The abundance of documents at our disposal allows to pinpoint its chronology, protagonists and content with precision.

Those negotiations between September 1954 and March 1956 aim at convincing Mgr Roy to ordain J. Vanier, incardinate him in his diocese and grant him the permission to stay at L’Eau vive. They spread over a lapse of 18 months’ time, which shows the extraordinary character of J. Vanier’s position. He expresses it directly in a letter to Mgr Roy, in which he mentions “the somewhat exceptional and delicate position in which I have been for a few years, a position that has caused me to

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, end of 1952, APJV.

2. See J. Vanier’s letter to G. and P. Vanier, early December 1954, APJV.

remain at L'Eau vive, outside the usual paths towards Priesthood"¹. His application actually demands some derogations to the current canonical regulations. This implies to approach Mgr Roy prudently and to camouflage the gravity of the situation at L'Eau vive as much as possible.

J. Vanier's training for priesthood is abnormal in many ways indeed. First of all because it is not controlled by any official institution, but only by persons acting privately: Canon Lallement, who has no canonical authority on him, T. Philippe who officially lost his right to guide in 1954 (this right had been maintained at first) and Marie-Dominique Philippe, vaguely presented as a warrant. J. Vanier thus escapes the frames established by the Church to make sure of the qualities of future priests, i.e. a diocesan seminar or the *studium* of a religious order.

It is mostly in his project of being incardinated in the diocese of Quebec that J. Vanier strays from the norm. He lives and resides in the diocese of Versailles, where he means to durably engage himself as priest. Despite this geographical location, his application shows his will not to be incardinated in France. The aim, which he never totally avowed, is to avoid finding himself under the control of a bishop who might easily get information about L'Eau vive. Instead, J. Vanier chooses a friend of his family's, 5 000 kms away from L'Eau vive. This limits the latter's possibilities of learning about the complex position in which the young man finds himself and the grievances accumulating against him in France and at the Holy Office. The distance also reduces his capacity to exercise the right of training and control that a bishop has to assure. This is pointed out in a letter dated May 31st, 1955 sent by Mgr Roy to Canon Lallement. Even if he is not opposed to the project, he underlines the fact that incardination in France would permit to "avoid any deficiency in his training for priesthood and provide him with a more brotherly circle when he begins to exercise his ministry"².

What is at stake in J. Vanier's negotiations is to overcome the objections by playing his trump cards. First the little group of personalities mobilized in his favour: his parents held in high esteem in the Canadian catholic circles, Canon Daniel Lallement, who had been Mgr Roy's

1. J. Vanier's letter to Mgr M. Roy, January 23rd 1956, AAQ.

2. Mgr M. Roy's letter to Canon D. Lallement, May 31st 1955, AICP.

professor at the Institut catholique¹ in-between the two World Wars and lastly Mgr Rupp, ecclesiastical patron of L'Eau vive since April 1953. The latter's support is decisive for he is auxiliary bishop of Paris, has a robust international experience and a strong institutional legitimacy since he is in charge of the ministry of foreigners in France.

It is with their support and through their help that J. Vanier presents his arguments to Mgr Roy. The above mentioned underline his qualities. In March 1955, Canon Lallement thus writes that his protégé shows "tact, reserve, dedication and moral firmness that do not only reveal fine human qualities but also an authentic supernatural life" and concludes that he "might become a priest entirely given to God and the Church and apt to provide services of which the souls of our times are in bad need"².

J. Vanier's supporters then point out the legitimacy of his incardination in the diocese of Quebec. In a letter dated November 1955, Canon Lallement writes that "it does not seem fit for M. Vanier to apply for incardination in a French diocese against the providential indication of his Canadian nationality", underlining that "for M. Vanier, Quebec is a family homestead"³. He then puts forward the fact that the international vocation of L'Eau vive causes it to welcome many Canadian and American students. On this point Mgr Rupp's intervention weighs most. In a letter sent a few weeks after Canon Lallement's, he buttresses the arguments of "that most excellent churchman":

I venture to express the wish that M. J. Vanier's incardination might be in a Canadian diocese; he wants to devote himself to L'Eau vive [...]; he needs a bishop. In case he were incardinated in a Canadian diocese, we might find him a post in France, in particular that of Chaplain of the Canadian students attending the Paris University⁴.

The argument probably weighs a lot in the decision of Mgr Roy, who, as early as the end of 1955, agrees on principle to J. Vanier's incardination in his diocese. There only remains to decide on the date of

1. "By bringing me your kind letter, M. J. Vanier gave me the utmost pleasure and suddenly revived the memories, especially dear, of the time when I had the good fortune to be one of your students." Mgr Roy's letter to Canon Lallement, May 31st 1955, AICP.

2. Canon D. Lallement's letter to Mgr Maurice Roy, March 8th 1955, AAQ.

3. Ibid.

4. Mgr J. Rupp's letter to Mgr M. Roy, November 26th 1955, AAQ.

the ordination and especially on the duration of the “training session” that J. Vanier will have to follow at the Quebec seminary. Canon Lallement, who defends the needs of L’Eau vive, manages to obtain that the session will only last three months. As early as March 1956, everything seems to fit into place: J. Vanier is to come to Quebec at the end of August 1956 and will remain at the seminary until the end of November and his ordination. His letters to his parents henceforth show that his only care is to complete his priest’s outfit. At the end of this presentation, we can only admire the energy and the strategy developed by J. Vanier and his close circles. But we can also wonder about Mgr Roy’s degree of information on L’Eau vive and its position.

Before closing on this point, we must underline that J. Vanier hereafter explains that he is in a priestly position as to L’Eau vive, resulting from a special mysterious grace. He thus writes to his parents in October 1956:

It is very delicate in cases such as the present one – We have the impression that Our Lord wants me to stay at L’Eau vive – there are providential signs –, but L’E.V. does not depend on oneself, nor on *one* bishop nor on the provincial of an order, – it is therefore something special. Would Monseigneur be ready to do something special?¹

The passage shows that J. Vanier has moved from priest of the Church to priest of L’Eau vive. It is also significant of his intimate conviction. L’Eau vive and his vocation are “something special”. The imprecision of the term permits both to hide the secret one is part of while invoke the register of singularity, predestination and mystery, and to try and wrap oneself in a supernatural legitimacy.

After the sanction of 1956: a suspended vocation

In May 1956, J. Vanier is thus persuaded of his oncoming ordination. On May 25th, he still receives a warm letter from Mgr Roy precisizing the modalities of his stay. But on May 29th, a letter signed by cardinal Pizzardo informs Mgr Roy about the measures taken against J. Vanier in particularly severe terms. The effect is that of a cold shower. Had the

1. J. Vanier’s letter to G. and P. Vanier, October 30th 1955, APJV.

decision still been lagging on for another 6 months, J. Vanier would have been ordained. The Holy Office did perceive the problem posed by J. Vanier’s project of an ordination:

This supreme Dicastery is not opposed indeed to the ordination to priesthood of this young man after a robust training in a seminary and under the control of his Ordinary.

But it opposes itself to a priestly ordination with a view to “L’Eau vive”, whether at the Soisy-sur-Seine Centre or in any foundation of that movement.¹

The will is to bring J. Vanier back to a more classical training, intended for the service of the universal Church and not a small group, which implies a training at a seminary, controlled by a bishop. The letter demands a “training of several years”.

The situation imposes J. Vanier to make decisions. For Mgr Roy accepts him to remain at the seminary, but for the whole duration now imposed. J. Vanier will thus be kept away from L’Eau vive and its members, from T. Philippe and with an orientation very different from that the one indicated by “special grace” that he thought he had received. The shock is hard. He is imposed to leave L’Eau vive before June 30th. On the 12th, two days after being notified, he writes to his parents to inform them of the situation. He mentions his need for some time to pray and discern and his decision to suspend his return to Canada *sine die* in order to spend “a little time” at the Bellefontaine Trappe. It is only on July 10th that he writes to Mgr Roy to inform him of his choices and to announce that he will write again to inform him of his future decisions.²

J. Vanier actually spends the Summer and September in Paris to see to the material problems of the closing down of L’Eau vive³. He by then puts up in a room at 15 place Vauban lent to him by Dr Préaut, which

1. Cardinal Pizzardo’s letter to cardinal Roy, May 29th 1956, AAQ and ACDF.

2. J. Vanier’s letter to Mgr Roy, July 10th 1956, AAQ.

3. It must be pointed out that nothing in the decision of the Holy Office imposes the closing down of L’Eau vive. What is demanded is only the departure of J. Vanier and his female staff. The Dominicans anyway seem to imagine that those departures ill enable them to take control over the hall again. This was not taking into account the hostility of Association L’Eau vive and of Mme de Cossé-Brissac. She considers that the Association can no longer afford to run the hall if deprived of that staff working for free and decides to close it down.

will be his Paris pied-à-terre until 1964. It is only on 3rd October that he leaves to install himself at Bellefontaine, where he will stay until July 1957. Between October and December 1956, he progressively defines his orientation for the years to come with the help of Marie-Dominique Philippe. It is on the occasion of the latter's passage at Bellefontaine that he decides¹ to suspend his project of ordination to priesthood. An excerpt from J. Vanier's interviews permits to understand what drives him at the moment he makes this choice fraught with consequences:

AM: "So, for you this meant dropping the idea of priesthood..."

JV: "At least for the time being. It was that I had to... Finally, there was for me the idea of remaining faithful to Fr Thomas, I would say. That was an absolute must. Fr Thomas Thomas was... I am not entering into detail about Fr Thomas, but the way it was done, the way he was treated, I simply could not bear. I could not say: "Okay, I give up, I'm going to Canada and get it all over with". That was out. So I call back cardinal Roy, who was the Quebec cardinal, and I tell him that I am not going to Quebec. He was furious, ever so furious².

"Absolute faithfulness" is what motivates his choice. "Waiting" for "what Jesus will ask from him" is tactually he same for him as waiting for his master's "liberation". He will devote the next eight years to this waiting. To the interrogations of his family and friends he repeatedly answers over the whole period that he "needs to pray in solitude" so as to hear what Jesus wants from him.

His successive places of residence during that time mirror this leitmotiv: Bellefontaine, where he spends a year and regularly comes back, Crulai in the Orne département, where he spends the next year (August 1957 – July 1958) in a small isolated and decrepit farm, Sierre and Törbel in Switzerland where he spends several months during the winter of 1958-1959 to recover from hepatitis, and eventually Fatima, where the house he had built (on the land bought for L'Eau vive) becomes his basecamp from May 1959 onward. Still, the supposed "solitude" of that life of his should not be overestimated. What can be reconstructed from his agenda over those eight years rather maps out

1. See chapter 9.

2. Research interview. A Mourges, 2009.

the route of a high-mobility gyrovague. His periods of solitude and stability hardly ever last more than two months. The rest of the time he is on the road. We thus find him in Paris to see his mother (then staying at the Royal Monceau Hôtel) as well as J. d'Halluin and A. de Rosambo, but also in Rome on a secret visit to T. Philippe or in Fribourg to monitor the studies of his younger brother Michel. His spiritual life and Marian devotion take him on pilgrimages to Lourdes and La Salette, to Bellefontaine or various other monasteries for retreats led by Marie-Dominique Philippe, to the Montpellier Carmel to visit Marie-Thérèse (the former prioress of the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel), to Thomery at the convent of the Little Sisters of the Holy Virgin. He also takes trips for holidays with his family in the various parts of France (Vézelay, where the Vaniers have been used to staying since their years at the embassy, Brittany, the Basque country, Paris), Canada or the Eastern United States, where he regularly stays for a few weeks.

Socially speaking, this time without a definite project places J. Vanier in a difficult position, especially as regards his parents, for he has been financially dependent on them since he left the Navy. That they are worrying can indirectly be perceived in the hundred or so letters that their son sends them over that period. In his own letters T. Philippe devotes long developments to suggesting J. Vanier what he must tell his parents to reassure them about his vocation and keep them waiting. Two long letters written in July as J. Vanier is in Crulai and his parents are about to come to France for their holidays, afford a glimpse into the arguments the monk uses and the hold he has on his disciple's life choices.

One first perceives the will to reassure them about the length of time necessary for the ongoing discernment. For that purpose, T. Philippe advises to muster spiritual arguments so as to make the Vaniers understand that parents must not oppose the divine will. He puts forward Biblical references, underlying that, on this point, "Jesus's words are terrible... Whoever does not [leave] his father because of me... and St Matthew in John's vocation does show that he quits his boat (his previous vocation) and his father "to follow Jesus"...¹. The argument is rather traditional: by reminding of the primacy of God's will, it

1. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, end of July 1958, APJV

underlines the liberty children must have to follow their own vocation. The next argument is far less classical:

You can tell him [Georges Vanier] I had told you that, in the lives of saints, one very often sees souls separated from their spiritual director, who had been a father much more than a director... with everything unique that his implies, according to St Paul even, they ask for many a counsel from saintly apostles but, unless the Holy Spirit itself requires it, they cannot take another director... [...]. Our Father in Heaven very often shows His will for some souls by allowing separations and practically forcing to resort to His Spirit Only for any private counsel.¹

Such arguments are straying from the usual norms in terms of spiritual direction and discernment. Drawing a parallel between his disciple's and the saints' lives, T. Philippe argues that, since J. Vanier cannot have access to him as director, he cannot be directed by anyone and must rely on "the Spirit Only" for discernment. T. Philippe's argument is poles apart from the prudence that the Church recommends as far as discernment is concerned and even more as regards "special grace" and mystique. In case this question really posed a problem to the Vaniers, T. Philippe advises their son to invent a story to reassure them:

I think that if your parents badger you with questions, etc., you can very well tell them that, since you don't want to act by yourself, you have quite confidentially, during a retreat, after much praying, asked counsel from a priest, as representing God, fully exposing the state of your soul, etc., and that he had told you that, everything considered, it did not seem supernaturally prudent (especially under outside influences) to make a decision by yourself on an especially supernatural question (a monk's or a priest's vocation. [...]) Supernatural prudence requires to keep it up, praying a lot... it especially demands us not to budge by ourselves, but wait for God's hour in everything...²

So T. Philippe simply asks him to invent a lie, which he deems to be "pious" enough to be forgivable, and to resort to a fictitious authority to calm the Vanier parents' qualms and have them accept to wait for "God's hour" and all it conceals. It is the wish to protect his own secrets that leads him to also advise his disciple to do his utmost in order to

1. Ibid
2. Ibid.

prevent his parents from seeking advice about their son's vocation from other monks or churchmen:

What is to be avoided is that they might want to ask counsel from Fr Browne or "official authorities", self-righteous as regards the internal forum... but not as to vocation, and especially not for you... Besides, the most authentic Christian tradition does show that vocation is something purely between the soul and its God¹.

This passage is the occasion to once more point out the specificity of J. Vanier's "vocation", which eventually cannot be distinguished by the common run of monks and priests. The development of such a strategy also aims at isolating J. Vanier from his parents. To offer J. Vanier a position socially more acceptable to his circle, Fr T. Philippe finally advises him to follow a career path that he might use "as a folding screen that conceals a hidden and secret life":

And if you can, rather quickly, put together a moral thesis [...]. It is easy afterwards to get an official course, that takes little time and hides... and provides a social position... Should you get even in Quebec a course for 3 months, it would enable you to live a solitary life the rest of the time... and to see me as a teacher, a former disciple remaining forever a disciple [...]. The life of a teacher, who teaches very few courses but who in his classes proves reassuring through the testimony he gives of his doctrine, of its balance, is perhaps the most suitable...²

This point permits to observe the way J. Vanier appropriates his master's advice. One is struck in this case by the coincidence between the project described in the Summer of 1958 This point permits to observe the way J. Vanier appropriates his master's advice. One is struck in this case by the coincidence between the project described in the Summer of 1958 and his life over the following years: the writing of his thesis, its defense in 1962 and the one-term course taught in Canada at the beginning of 1964. One also notes that in this time of waiting the master and the disciple do not despair to see a more acceptable path to priesthood than the one imposed by the Holy Office in 1956 reopen itself. Their hope is strongly revived two months later

1. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, end of July 1958, APJV
2. Ibid. On this point of the thesis, see chapter 4

when cardinal Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli becomes the new Pope on October 28th 1958.

John XXIII, the “good shepherd”?

To understand the enthusiasm that his election generates, one must remember the old, friendly relationships that had existed between Georges and Pauline Vanier and Mgr Roncalli since 1945. George Vanier had been Ambassador in Paris at the same time when Mgr Roncalli was the Apostolic Nuncio (1945-1953). Roncalli's *Journal de France* indicates that he had received T. Philippe four times between 1946 and 1952 and visited L'Eau vive twice, on June 15th, 1949 and March 3rd, 1952, making very positive remarks¹. Once the crisis had broken out, he had kept his distances from the community, considering that it was “preferable for the nuncio to abstain from interfering”². He nevertheless twice receives J. Vanier, the new director, between April and August 1952 and finds him especially interesting... and edifying”³. Once patriarch of Venice, he receives him with his parents in April 1954 only to hear a new plea for the support of L'Eau vive. This does not make him abandon his restraint, but does not compromise the positive image the members of L'Eau vive have of him. So they view his election as a sign of hope, and Anne de Rosanbo writes to J. Vanier:

Let us pray well for John XXIII. [...] We dare not count too much on the former good relationships of Mgr Roncalli with N. [T. Philippe] and L'E.V. to see the end of “prison” for N.? But finally one must pray a lot in any case I suppose that Jer. [J. Vanier] will get as much special audience as he wants. “Most Holy Father, I did happen to pass in front of the Vatican, so I came up to say hello”...⁴

1. On March 3rd 1952 he notes down: “Interesting encounter. Like everything at its beginning, the group is liable to progress, but the spirit that moves it is excellent.” Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, *Journal de France*, Tome 2 1949-1953, Paris, Cerf, 2008.

2. “In the afternoon, long conversation with young Vanier about the adventures at “L'Eau vive”. From the various contacts with monks and young laymen, something untoward, imprudent must have happened, which brought about a certain crisis, in which it is preferable that the nuncio should not interfere. There have however been good wills put at the disposal of the Lord's grace towards good service.” August 12th 1953, Roncalli, *Journal*, op. cit., p. 658.

3. August 12th 1952, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, *Ibid.*, p. 606.

4. A. de Rosanbo's letter to J. Vanier, October 29th 1958, APJV.

Georges and Pauline Vanier are sharing this hope. They quickly offer their son to go to Rome and intercede in his favour. But J. Vanier does not seem convinced by this approach and, in a letter dated December 25th, he asks them not to come especially to Europe to that effect but to wait until their annual stay. He adds that as to the decision of the Holy Office on his ordination:

They stated that if I wished to continue towards Holy orders, I should have to pass by a seminary. Which is – as you know – quite normal and right.¹

He thus recognizes that there is nothing to be asked for him and even refuses any intercession in his favour. He however suggests that this might be useful for others:

This does not mean to say that they are not others who can possibly be helped by an intervention of the Holy Father: such as Père Thomas, Mère Cécile or Mère Thérèse.

On February 3rd, a new letter from J. Vanier shows that his parents have obtained a private audience for him on March 18th². The letter dated February 20th reveals that they have solicited a relative, Fr Paul Vanier (s.j.)³, for advice. He wrote out a memorandum forwarded to J. Vanier. The document is not to be found in his archives, but his long commentary enables us to grasp its content.

The second point of that memorandum that seems relevant to J. Vanier is its conclusion. The Jesuit defends the possibility to try approaches in his favour. And J. Vanier comments: “It is possible to ask the Holy Father to remit the three penalties [removal from L'Eau vive, prohibition to found a new Eau vive, obligation to spend several years in a seminary] if thoses [sic] harm my reputation and through this an apostolic action later on.” The passage reveals that the measures taken against him in 1956 are “penalties” and therefore a condemnation in his eyes. The use of the term actually is excessive, for he has not been

1. J. Vanier's letter to G. and P. Vanier, December 25th 1958, APJV.

2. J. Vanier's letter to G. and P. Vanier, February 3rd 1959, APJV.

3. Paul Vanier († 1968) entered the Company of Jesus on September 7th 1930. After his doctor's degree in theology and his ordination in 1942, he is assigned at Collège Jean-de Brébeuf in Montreal. He is regularly mentioned in the correspondence between J. Vanier and his parents.

judged; no file of procedure has been open with his name. The measures taken against him are simple dispositions aiming at putting an end to a situation that had become inadmissible and reminding of the norm (such as training at a seminary, which he himself recognized as legitimate from the point of view of the ecclesial norm. His position in this letter seems to contradict his statement in the letter of December 25th, in which he had said that there was nothing to be asked for him. He mentions Fatima and we understand that he has not given up the crazy project to found a new Eau vive there: "Besides, I think that John XXIII will not be against it for in Venice he had told me 'When are you coming to found an Eau vive in Venice?'"¹.

If the conclusion of the memorandum enables him to prepare his own defense, he is critical of the rest of the text, which proposes to prepare an address to John XXIII that would be "like a 'petition' written with the counsel of a Roman prelate" and especially to prepare for the revision of the trial and sanctions that struck T. Philippe and his circle. We can guess that those proposals are apt to frighten J. Vanier. For his parents actually refuse to believe in the heavy charges against T. Philippe, of which they probably only have a softened version. Such an approach might lead the Holy Office to inform them. The proposed audience therefore represents a danger for him. To limit it, he proposes another strategy, which he introduces by drawing a glowing portrait of John XXIII as "a good shepherd", wary of procedures and administration. He concludes that the only valuable strategy is to apply to John XXIII as "the good merciful shepherd" and to carefully avoid appearing litigious and aggressive:

I am saying all this to show that, concerning John XXIII, it is better for you to present your application orally – in simple words – the way children apply to Jesus's Vicar, the agent of His Mercy on earth. To do it by referring not to points of justice but of mercy, asking for the grace to annul the 3 penalties which might some day become an object of scandal.²

We can here see an argument characteristic of the brothers Philippe's system of defense appear: putting forward mercy to the detriment of

1. J. Vanier's letter to G. and P. Vanier, February 20th 1959, APJV.

2. J. Vanier's letter to G. and P. Vanier, February 20th 1959, APJV.

justice. It enables J. Vanier to avoid being confronted under his parents' gaze with the serious events of which he is suspected to have been an accomplice. He is here nevertheless trapped by his own lies. On the one hand, he has convinced his parents that T. Philippe is an unfairly condemned saint and that he himself has suffered because of his faithfulness. But to protect this lie, he must on the other hand prevent them from developing this line of defense and demanding justice. He finds himself forced to develop a contradictory argumentation. This is what is shown by the two addresses that he and his parents present to John XXIII during the private audience on March 18th next. Dated from March 7th, they reveal that the argument proposed by J. Vanier has imposed itself. The first, in defense of T. Philippe, which nearly totally avoids referring to the charges against the latter, is devoted to praising the Dominican and highlighting the loss for the Church and the world at large that his detention incommunicado represents. The only favour asked for is that "he might renew normal contact with his friends"¹. The second concerns J. Vanier. It recalls his itinerary since 1950 and the three measures which, "although there is nothing he can be personally blamed for"², have touched him. It then describes his "life of solitude and prayer" since 1956, his doctor's degree and the state of his vocational questioning: "Jean actually feels more and more that his vocation is contemplative, but he does not believe that the Good Lord wants him to join a contemplative order, such as the Trappists or the Carthusians³ right now.". The address at last mentions what it is about:

I believe it my duty as a father to implore a grace of mercy for him. I am not asking for anything that might change his present life for I trust him and the Spirit that guides him, but only the suppression of the interdictions weighing on him [a reader here underlines the words and adds an "?" in

1. Address by Georges Vanier to John XXIII in favour of T. Philippe, March 7th 1959, ACDF.

2. He mentions elements of his son's narrative of the events: "The Most Reverend Fr Ducatillon [...] specified in that there was nothing he could be personally blamed for. Jean was never notified of the reason why he had been removed from L'Eau vive and has never been examined by whoever." George Vanier's address to John XXIII in favour of J. Vanier, March 7 1969. ACDF.

3. Address by Georges Vanier to John XXIII in favour of J. Vanier, March 7th 1959, ACDF.

pencil in the right-hand margin]. The interventions of the Holy Office on a child of the Church are something serious and risk to cause suspicions and distrusts, and further on stand in the way of a possible apostolate and accession to priesthood, if God wishes so.¹

One is struck by the awkwardness of the address and its contradictions, which can only have puzzled those it was presented to. J. Vanier thus presents himself as contemplative but is applying for a possible priestly apostolate. The suppression of the prohibitions is applied for, but without naming them. The question mark in the margin indicates one of the reader's incomprehension. The author did not dare mention the interdictions pertaining to L'Eau vive, the lifting of the ban, the first of which can hardly be imagined (the community being closed), while it cannot be envisaged for the second (allowing J. Vanier to found a new Eau vive). As to priesthood, it is by no means forbidden to him, as J. Vanier himself recognized in front of his parents. Badly expressed, his application is hardly admissible. His awkwardness can also be explained by the mixture of hope and naivety that moves him in a letter written shortly after the audience:

As to the success of the applications, I do feel that the Good Lord is asking me to remain in the utmost abandonment. [...] I realize that from a humane point of view – especially if the Holy Father does not have the time to deeply look into things – he will always risk to ask the Congregation of the Holy Office for its advice and they would want to defend their point of view.²

He envisages the very unlikely event that John XXIII might make his decision without consulting those that are acquainted with the case. Still an event that he has told of to his biographers and his narrative on “the prehistory of L'Arche” shows he is aware that the audience has little chance to succeed. John XXIII took advantage of a moment when they were alone in the lift to say to him: “You must leave Fr Thomas.” Then J. Vanier precises his reaction to those words: “I left with my heart bleeding but peaceful inside. I knew that I was too connected with Jesus through Fr Thomas to be able to leave him. [...] I could only leave him by being unfaithful to Jesus and to what he expected from me.”³

1. Ibid.

2. J. Vanier's letter to G. et P. Vanier, March 27th 1959, APJV.

3. J. Vanier : “Sur la préhistoire de l'Arche”, 2003, APJV.

On March 24th next, his fears are confirmed since the Secretariate of State asks the opinion of the Holy Office¹. Paul Philippe being still a member of the Holy Office, the answer comes as early as on April 2nd, 1959. We do not know the one concerning T. Philippe but everything indicates that it was negative. Concerning J. Vanier, after reminding that Pauline Vanier was formerly spiritually directed by T. Philippe and that her son was appointed as being his “most fanatical” disciple, it states:

The Holy Office did not forbid J. Vanier to be ordained for priesthood, but, according to the extant statutes, only demanded that he spend at least a few years in a seminary before his possible ordination, despite the fact that he had already ended his canonical studies in philosophy and theology at the Dominican faculty of Le Saulchoir².

Sensible and lawfully founded, the answer confirms that the address must have seemed very strange to the Holy Office. The other “penalties” are simply not mentioned. To close the point, a last passage from a letter written by T. Philippe to J. Vanier after the audience must be quoted. He is commenting on his disciple's account of the interview:

Thank you for what you and your father did for me, entrust it all to Mary. But I think it would be better not to attempt a second approach that risks to displease or compromise, or too strongly highlight the links between you and me... or even between your family and me... The word the Holy Father told you about me, with his gesture, seems like a discreet indication that They [perhaps Jesus and Mary] give us that the Good Lord is not enlightening John XXIII in this affair, that Mary prefers the whole domain to remain hidden. I believe that Pepi [Paul Philippe] has the ear of the H. Father and that even he does not wish our links to be reestablished ... He must have been influenced by Fr de Men [Menasce] and Fr Ducat [Ducatillon] and perhaps unknowingly by Fr Avril...³

The passage once more evidences the stratagems that T. Philippe and his disciple use to try and extenuate the sanctions and be able to publicly renew their contacts. It also offers a good example of the conviction they share of the superiority of the “graces” they live over the rest

1. Address by Georges Vanier to John XXIII in favour of J. Vanier, March 7th 1959, ACDF

2. Answer of the Holy Office for the Holy Father's audience of April 2nd 1959, ACDF

3. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, end of March-beginning of April 1959, APJV

of the Church, here represented by its highest-ranking representative, whom the Good Lord “is not enlightening” on this affair. The file also shows that, despite Georges Vanier’s insistence, despite friendship and ancient relationships, the decision of the Holy Office is maintained: Paul Philippe is enlightening John XXIII, who asks J. Vanier to “leave Fr Thomas”.

Between priestly vocation and prophetic mission

In May 1959, T. Philippe and J. Vanier are again confronted to the firmness of the Holy Office. True to his logic, J. Vanier then prolongs the suspension of his priestly vocation for a duration that he cannot yet foresee. Those legitimate brakes imposed to his vocational projects by the hierarchy have an impact on his rapport with the Church and on the way he perceives his vocation. The priesthood would enable him to acquire an official legitimacy. For the female supporters of L’Eau vive, for those “initiated” by T. Philippe in secrecy, he already is a figure of spiritual authority. The question posed is how he now perceives and plays the spiritual role which he aspires to in the ambiguous position he holds between 1956 and 1964. Does he position himself as “almost priest” among the “insiders” partaking of the secret? Is it the way they consider him? Or does the impossibility to access this form of legitimacy (to take up Max Weber’s categories of religious sociology) conversely bring him to move away from it and make up for it by way of a more prophetic form?

Between 1956 and 1964, the persons whom J. Vanier is in regular contact with now form a much smaller and more scattered group, geographically speaking, than of L’Eau vive. His extreme mobility, however, enables him to keep it together by a strong influence on some of them. This capacity of influence, without comparison with the one he will exercise at L’Arche later on is akin to a first experiment in a form of charismatic activity. Central to the network is the circle of the “initiated insiders”, consisting of J. d’Halluin, A. de Rosambo and himself, whose chief aim is to support T. Philippe while remaining secretly connected to him and prolonging his mystico-sexual practices.

To understand the role he is experimenting, one must begin by observing what is mirrored to him by the letters he receives from

various personalities as to his spiritual role, and wondering on the way those representations shape the image he has of himself. Let us recall before this that his functions at L’Eau vive have already given him a certain aura. We have seen that his being faithful to T. Philippe was a strong factor of legitimization with the members of the community and that, for those around him, this period constitutes the sign of his quality and remarkable destiny. After 1956, it is T. Philippe who secretly exercises the most decisive influence on him. T. Philippe wants to assure him that he is still called on by God to play a major role. His letters also evidence his will to make the failure of L’Eau vive acceptable. So, in this extract dating from 1957:

They [Jesus and Mary] still make me feel very strongly that They are pleased with You, with the sacrifice you have spontaneously, freely offered them of your priesthood, – at least for the time being – as a testimony of your faith in those mystic graces and in the inward calling of the Holy Spirit. They more and more establish a deep union between us. I so strongly feel that They unite me with you more intimately than with my brothers, priests or monks, and all the more so than with my brothers by nature, precisely because of your sacrifice, which gives you a choice place in Their Hearts. You and I are all one and the [words illegible] “little ones” since you have accepted to give up any personal life, any personal apostolate, to be the tiny little servant of Jesus.¹

In this perspective, the sacrifice of J. Vanier’s vocation becomes the sign of his new vocation. He is the one who made the choice of remaining faithful to his master, with whom he is “all one”. This fusion (or rather confusion) is, the way T. Philippe puts it, something unique in his life. One may notice that this speech indirectly reveals how solitary the Dominican feels and what almost vital need he has of J. Vanier. To make the latter accept his sacrifice, he grants him immediate access to the exceptional mystic graces that he describes in the same letter:

Jesus ever so quickly takes his tiny little servant onto his Heart. He is like forced to cut corners to immediately grant you graces that would normally suppose, in supernatural economy itself, a long preparation...²

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, 1957, APJV.

2. Ibid

J. Vanier would thus now be at a degree of mystic “illumination” close to his master’s, which justifies the missions that he will complete in “hidden life” (this is how T. Philippe calls the type of solitary life that he and his circle lead at the time). The first of those is to make up for T. Philippe’s absence among the “tout petits” (the little ones), i.e. the initiated women, i.e. J.d’Halluin, A. de Rosambo and a few others that join them as of the Autumn of 1959. It is in words that must sound loud to J. Vanier’s ears that T. Philippe defines that mission in a letter dating from 1958:

They [Jesus and Mary] have chosen you to be their tiny little instrument, to replace the priest among the little ones, who have known love, who have known the so strong testimonies of love and who are too little not to be sustained any more by its visible signs.

I can feel that they above all want this so great humility of the instrument, the humility of Joseph indeed, which keeps Mary’s heart for Jesus alone.¹

J. Vanier is thus appointed to “replace the priest” and act as the latter among the “little ones”. Even if the close sexual or emotional gestures are not explicitly described, the passage strongly suggests that this is what is meant. In this system of mystico-sexual beliefs, J. Vanier would from now intervene as T. Philippe’s substitute or vicar. It must, however, be noted that the latter’s emphasis actually masks a paltry reality since, when he writes the letter, the “little ones” only means J. d’Halluin and A. de Rosambo. Still, after 1959, the little group seems to grow with new initiated women, to whom J. Vanier is charged to minister in lieu of T. Philippe². But beyond those and the women who might join the circle, J. Vanier is encouraged by T. Philippe to be a “hidden apostle”. First of all among other churchmen close to T. Philippe, who might receive those “graces”:

I pray a lot, for your thesis also and for your relationships with Did [M.-D. Philippe], de Mont. [J. de Monléon, in spite of the “t”] and Can. Lall. and Rb [unidentified person], that the Spirit might inspire and anyway preside over those relationships [...]. They may, this very moment, be in need of a small instrument who, under the very real appearance of a disciple preparing his thesis might be an [unction], a consolation, an experience.³

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, 1958, APJV.

2. See chapter 7.

3. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, October 1961, APJV.

J. Vanier is invited to be some kind of “undercover agent” who, hiding his quality of “advanced mystic” under the cover of a Ph.D. student, is patiently trying to “convert” those intellectual personalities.

By his life choices, J. Vanier evidences his assimilation of T. Philippe’s advice. Language elements identical to T. Philippe’s can be found in his letters to his parents, in which “long meditations” occupy a growing space. As the letters follow each other, the same elements are tirelessly repeated: the apology of littleness and abandonment into God’s hands, sacrifice, a hidden and solitary life, the risk of pride that awaits those exercising visible functions in the world or within the Church. There were examples of this already in the letters preparing the audience with John XXIII. Yet another can be quoted in a letter sent to his mother shortly before the 1956 sanction:

Your little Jock will be in good hands, never fear, and perhaps all this is for no purpose but that all glory (every ounce) should go to Heaven. Nothing is without purpose, and it remains merely to see the indications of the field that Providence wants to be worked. There may be plans that require a dependence even more directly immediate. The main is that there is an all-powerful Hand directing every detail; O Mummy, put your trust in His eternal Church.¹

In this passage, typical of the hyper-spiritualization of J. Vanier’s discourse at the time, one is struck by the certainty he evidences. He explains the divine plan and Jesus and Mary’s will with authority, as if he now were its custodian in charge of enlightening the others. Even if his priestly vocation happens to be suspended, he now speaks as a “professional” of spirituality.

It is probably among the women “initiated” or those closest to him that his incipient spiritual influence is most efficient. The trace of this can be found in the letters sent to him by some former female residents of L’Eau vive. It is possible to give a significant example of his role among them. It is taken from a letter that Maryse Hueber sends him in April 1961:

Jesus very strongly unites me to you, especially on holy days and since Easter. The latest graces, for which I am so grateful, have much transformed me into you, purified. Jesus teaches me to live more and more in the

1. J. Vanier’s letter to G. and P. Vanier, June 29th 1956, APJV.

present moment on this total gift of the heart in its most intimate. [...] And Jesus has especially put a very clear insight into your heart in order to detect the demon's tricks to deter me from that confidence.¹

To close this point, the 1956-1964 years represent a time of experimentation for J. Vanier. Placed in a difficult situation, he is probably not conscious of all that he is living at the time and of the strength of his master's continued hold on him. With the passing of time and the documentation available, we notice that his writings, full of great mystic bursts, are hiding a dire reality: that of a tiny group turned in upon beliefs that isolate them from the world. If his influence on this group can no longer rely on a supposedly near priesthood, he shows how attached he is to it. Without being totally aware of it, he probably endorses some aspects of the priesthood, notably because T. Philippe asks him to be his substitute for some actions with the initiated women. He is thus mastering some of the priest's functions and especially that of accompaniment and spiritual counsel. At the same time, he is learning how to use the charismatic and prophetic register from his master, thus laying the bases of a spiritual authority which, to make up for the absence of institutional legitimacy, relies on promoting a direct relationship with divinity.

A priesthood for L'Arche? (1975-1978)

We have little information on how J. Vanier perceives the way his vocation will evolve after the 1959 episode. Rare indications make us understand that the subject is not closed. After 1964, although not rehabilitated, T. Philippe has been "freed" and the women he "initiated" may renew closer relationships with him, if they remain discreet. In this context, we may put forward the hypothesis that a new application to the Roman authorities might have seemed imprudent.

At the same time, the foundation and the rapid growth of L'Arche are absorbing J. Vanier's energy. In 1975, after three years of existence, the Trosly-Breuil community counts 300 members. Three more communities have been founded in France, 12 in North America, 1 in Denmark,

1. Marise Hueber's letter to J. Vanier, April 6th 1961, APJV.

2 in Belgium, 2 in the United Kingdom, 1 in the Ivory Coast and 2 in India. They have all been recently united into a *Fédération internationale des Communautés de L'Arche*.

Simultaneously, J. Vanier is successfully developing an activity as preacher and writer on spiritual matters. He multiplies retreats and talks in France and North America, in front of audiences often consisting of hundreds, or even several thousands, of people. The charismatic register that he has mastered in a small group prior to 1964 now serves him to shine among a large public. These achievements progressively help obfuscate the stigma of the L'Eau vive years. This is probably what brings him to present a new request in January 1975, when he applies for ordination without passing through a seminary. He is encouraged in this by Mgr Stéphane Desmazières who, since his appointment as bishop of the diocese of Beauvais, Noyon and Senlis in 1965, has taken to the budding community and supports it.

J. Vanier's new application is known through the documents supplied by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It takes two years and a half, between January 1975 and July 1977 for it to be processed. This rather long duration can be explained by the fact that the case was not a priority, by administrative dysfunctions and the slowness of communication between the dicasteries concerned. Beside the applicant and Mgr Desmazières, who supports the application, Pope Paul VI, the Apostolic Nuncio to France, Mgr Egano Righi-Lambertini, and two dicasteries are implicated in the processing. Paul VI is implicated twice. The Apostolic Nuncio is informed of the case, in order to relay the Vatican's decisions to those concerned. But it is especially the Secretariat of State and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the new name of the Holy Office since 1969) that deal with the case. In this affair, the former is represented by Mgr Giovanni Benelli¹, deputy of the Cardinal Secretary of State. He is one of the strongmen of the Curia and a close collaborator of Paul VI. J. Vanier's application is initially sent to him and he will play a

1. Mgr Giovanni Benelli (1921-1982) becomes bishop in 1950 and follows a remarkable career in the Vatican's diplomatic service. On June 29th 1967, he enters the Curia as Deputy to the Cardinal Secretary of State and becomes one of the close collaborators of Paul VI, who appoints him Archbishop of Florence and makes him Cardinal on June 3rd 1977.

decisive role in its processing. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, whose advice he quickly solicits, is represented by the Cardinal Prefect, Franjo Seper, a Croatian, and his secretary, Jean-Jérôme Hamer, a Dominican. The latter is acquainted with the L'Eau vive affair, since he had been appointed Regent at Le Saulchoir in July 1956.

The sequence opens on January 18th, 1975 with a letter from J. Vanier to Mgr Desmazières¹, to inform him of his wish to be ordained, pointing out his studies in philosophy and theology and the impossibility for him to spend time at a seminary owing to his responsibilities. Since he has mentioned the 1956 measures, Mgr Desmazières advises him to consult Mgr Benelli and precise that “his bishop would be very favorable to this ordination”². This J. Vanier does on January 28th, accompanying his letter with a copy of his exchanges with Mgr Desmazières, including an 8-page typed report presenting L'Arche and the role he feels called upon to play in it as priest. Two months and a half later, on April 15th 1975, Mgr Benelli forwards this application to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, asking for advice that would take into account J. Vanier's role in the L'Eau Vive affair³.

The Congregation pronounces itself with a decree of May 3rd⁴, the content of which is communicated to Mgr Benelli by letter on May 16th⁵. It recalls J. Vanier's liabilities. We understand that the dicastery only has a very vague idea of his past since 1956 and thinks that he has been living a solitary life in Canada. What is especially obvious is that it asks itself questions on J. Vanier's attitude:

There is some cause for a not quite unjustified perplexity in the double circumstance according to which there is no appearance that J. Vanier has abided by the legitimate injunction he received in 1956 to spend at least a few years at a Seminary and, on the other hand, the fact that the “chaplain” of L'Arche for nearly ten years has precisely been Fr T. Philippe, o.p., who, although he is repentant and rehabilitated after his “removal” in 1956, and he too strongly is

1. Copy of JV's letter to Mgr Stéphane Desmazières (SD), date January 18th 1975. ACDF.

2. Copy of Mgr Stéphane Desmazières's letter to J. Vanier, undated. ACDF.

3. Mgr Benelli's letter to Mgr Hamer, April 15th 1975. ACDF.

4. Decree of the particular Congregation, May 3rd 1975. ACDF.

5. CDF's letter to Mgr Benelli. May 16th 1975. ACDF.

supported by the bishop of Beauvais, nevertheless remains defined by specialists as being “limitedly vicious” by nature as regards his pseudo-mysticism and is for that reason regarded as a possible danger for the souls.

These prudent remarks, however, contrast with their conclusion:

There are no special reservations to formulate concerning an answer to be given to the aforementioned Orator [J. Vanier], but preferably through his Bishop, Mgr Desmazières, to whom it would be deemed proper to leave the whole responsibility, provided summary information on the case is supplied, concerning the opportunity of a possible ordination of the Orator, *servatis de jure servandis*.¹

The Congregation gives the impression that it wants to offload its obligations on the bishop, whom it knows to be favorable to the application. Reminding of the necessity to “do what the law imposes” perhaps refers to a seminary training, but without any precision as to the duration nor any control disposition. This attitude, which seems both prudent (in the respect of the law) and imprudent (considering the records) may be explained by the change of generations within the personnel of the Congregation (20 years have passed), which obfuscates the memory of the events and their gravity. An internal memo of the Congregation, dated June 10th, suggests that Mgr Benelli has not been convinced by this answer. We understand that exchanges have taken place and that the Secretariat of State asks for further research. Mgr Hamer's opinion is asked for, owing to his presence at Le Saulchoir in 1956. The author of the memo, not too keen on continuing his research, suggests that the Secretariat of State might do it and concludes:

To be true, one must acknowledge that, over the numerous years that have elapsed since the serious events we know, no charge has emerged against Fr Philippe and even less, not the slightest suspicion, against J. Vanier, who, from what can be deduced of what he himself was writing to the Secretariat of State, would have enjoyed wide esteem and a great liberty of action. [...] We might deduce that if everybody likes him, especially the priests he has been preaching to, without causing negative reactions [...], J. Vanier and his conceptions of priesthood should no longer raise suspicion.²

1. “What the law imposes being done”, letter from the CDF to Mgr Benelli, May 16th 1975, ACDF.

2. Mgr Casazza's note to Secretary Jean-Jérôme Hamer, June 10th 1975, ACDF.

The next document is produced 5 months later, on November 12th; it is the account given to Mgr Hamer by Mgr Benelli of his interview with J. Vanier¹. The exchange Mgr Benelli has with J. Vanier confirms him in his worries about the latter's conception of the priesthood. This interview represents a turning point in the procedure by bringing Benelli to demand that the Congregation review its position. He is given a new answer on November 29th: Mgr Desmazières is left in control of the situation, while being asked to apply the measure decided in 1956, i.e. several years spent in a seminary².

Mgr Benelli answers this letter only eight months later. In his letter to the Congregation dated July 31st, 1976, we learn that "owing to a regrettable classification error, the file had been lost in the archives"³. A year and a half after his application, J. Vanier has yet to receive an answer. Without any embarrassment at the delay, Mgr Benelli takes up the whole thing in hand and firmly indicates to the Congregation that J. Vanier "may certainly valuably employ his dedication to the service of the Church as a layman, but not as priest." He concludes by saying that he does not think it "desirable to leave to Mgr Desmazières the care to solve the case on the basis of summary information"⁴. The tone has changed and Mgr Benelli no longer contents himself with expressing his reservations but uses his authority to successfully impose his position. On August 2nd, the Congregation sends a telegram to the Apostolic Nuncio to ask him to get in touch with Mgr Desmazières to indicate that he must not proceed to J. Vanier's ordination, inform him that "an interview in Rome"⁵ will be necessary and that an explanatory letter is to be sent shortly. It is sent on August 5th and again maintains the necessity for J. Vanier to go through a seminary, underlining the fact that, for the past 20 years, he has not "realized the condition that had been imposed on him"⁶. But also keeping up connections with T. Philippe at L'Arche is something worrying, which "does not evidence a spirit of docility towards the decision of 1956".

1. J. Vanier is in Rome October 22-29 on a pilgrimage with "Foi et Lumière". Note by Mgr Benelli concerning an interview with J. Vanier on October 29th 1975. November 12th 1975. ACDF.

2. CDF's letter to Mgr Benelli, May 16th 1976. ACDF.

3. Mgr Benelli's letter to the CDF, July 31st 1976. ACDF.

4. Ibid.

5. CDF's coded telegram to the Apostolic Nuncio to France, August 2nd 1976. ACDF.

6. CDF's letter to Mgr Desmazières, August 5th 1976. ACDF.

This triggers a critical reaction from Mgr Desmazières. It is apparent during the interview to which he is summoned by Mgr Hamer in early November 1976. The account of the interview signals that Mgr Hamer informed him in detail of J. Vanier's attitude at L'Eau vive, reading him some documents in the file, but these explanations are not sufficient for the bishop and Mgr Hamer bitterly acknowledges his failure:

The conversation, which was prolonged over an hour and a half, did not permit to convince Mgr Desmazières that the decision made was founded. [...] Mgr Desmazières concluded: "We once more hit upon total incomprehension."¹

After this interview, the bishop explains his disagreement at length in a letter to Cardinal Seper of December 7th. Indicating that "this unfounded suspicion against Mr Vanier's person and the picking on him after 20 years" are "really inexplicable", he tries to refute the charges against him. Contrary to the Congregation's opinion, he considers that J. Vanier has abided by the decisions of 1956. Concerning the priesthood, he writes that the blame against J. Vanier for not respecting the condition imposed in 1956 for 20 years does not hold, because he would have entirely given up the project during that time. He puts forward the argument that "it was only at the beginning of 1974 that he again felt God's call". We realize that Mgr Desmazières is ignorant of the 1959 approach and of the continuity of J. Vanier's desire. He protests against the criticisms raised by the persistence of the links between J. Vanier and T. Philippe:

But what is wrong? Much before I arrived in the diocese of Beauvais, Fr T. Philippe, in his disgrace, had found a humble post as chaplain in a home for disabled people. [...] This is where Mr J. Vanier first experimented a small home of L'Arche. [...] The charity has grown in a manner which, to my mind, is providential. Despite his getting older and being of fragile health, Fr T. Philippe humbly carries on his job among the disabled. I personally daily see the most beneficial fruits of this collaboration.²

1. Note on the visit of the bishop of Beauvais, Mgr Desmazières, to the CDF, November 9th 1976, ACDF.

2. Mgr Desmazières's letter to Cardinal Seper, November 7th 1976, ACDF.

The passage reveals the bishop's admiration for the community, which he knows well, but also his blindness towards its founders. His confidence is such that he is taking up their version to the detriment of the more somber one presented by the Congregation. Coming back to Rome in January 1977 for his visit *ad limina*, he makes new approaches, first with Paul VI in front of whom he pleads for J. Vanier's cause, then with Mgr Hamer, whom he meets on January 13th. A letter that he writes to him upon his return shows that the interview was not more satisfactory than the previous one and that the conflict is worsening: "Proceeding from this judgment – which the Bishop does not agree with – the S.C. de Fide imposes a veritable diktat to the bishop in a sphere which eminently concerns his episcopal responsibility, without listening to his opinion or asking what he thinks"¹.

The members of the Congregation cannot ignore his insistence and the rights that go with his function. On February 7th, Cardinal Seper writes him that "the case of Mr J. Vanier is being studied again" and invites him to give his opinion so that it might be taken into account. He lastly informs him that as soon as the file is completed, "it will be submitted to the Cardinals in the Congregation for examination, and then passed on to the Holy Father for a final decision"².

The Congregation then calls on the expertise of Paul Philippe, who is by then at the top of his career, since he was made Cardinal and appointed at the head of the Congregation of Eastern Churches in 1973. On January 21st, Cardinal Seper sends him a request:

So as to be able to prepare a sure evaluation of the arguments offered by several parties and present a valid document, written by a person of undeniable qualification to the judgment of the most eminent fathers of this Dicastery, the C.P. of 8th instant has decided to ask Your Eminence his *votum* on the subject.³

Paul Philippe delivers his *votum* in a letter of March 9th, 1977. This 20-page typed document shows that he carefully plunged himself into the archives and is acquainted with the recent documents pertaining to

1. Mgr Desmazières's letter to Cardinal Seper, January 17th 1977, ACDF.

2. Cardinal Seper's letter to Mgr Desmazières, February 7th 1977, ACDF.

3. Cardinal Seper's letter to Cardinal Philippe, January 21st 1977, ACDF.

J. Vanier's application. It reveals that, like Mgr Benelli, he interviewed J. Vanier on the subject when the latter came to Rome in January 1975. His analysis is developed in three points devoted to "J. Vanier's behavior in connection with T. Philippe's deviations from 1950 to 1956", "J. Vanier's desire of priesthood" and "S.E. Mgr Desmazières's application towards J. Vanier's ordination and examination of the situation at L'Arche in the light of precedents". On the first point, the Dominican highlights with characteristic prudence and rigour that, whereas the Holy Office has never had sufficient proof of J. Vanier's participation in T. Philippe's deviations, his attitude and visible behaviour, as well as the different testimonies, impose to seriously consider its possibility and to show the utmost prudence as to his application. As for the other points, the content of which will be analyzed further on, they lead Cardinal Philippe to a peremptory conclusion:

The following passage from the letter that Card. Pizzardo was writing on May 29th, 1956 on behalf of the Most Eminent Fathers must be read again: "This young man has shown a total absence of judgment in the appreciation of the moral responsibility of a person whose deviations he knew and whom he has defended beyond the limits of true charity, by presenting him all around as an unrecognized saint" (Doc n° 76). In 1976, the Most Excellent Mgr Benelli, Deputy Secretary of State, and the Most Eminent Cardinal Seper, Prefect of this Holy Congregation, were using the same phrases because Mr J. Vanier, unfortunately, had not changed in twenty years' time¹.

Concerning J. Vanier's ordination, he falls in with the opinion of Mgr Benelli and the Congregation: the project must be abandoned for good. This new negative opinion brings about the unanimous decision of the Congregation Cardinals on May 11th, 1977: "*In decisio et ne proponatur amplius pro ordinatione sacerdotale*"². In other words, it is decided that J. Vanier must never again be proposed for priestly ordination. Validated by Paul VI, the decision is transmitted to the Nuncio to Paris on the following July 4th, for him to orally inform J. Vanier and then provide a written answer to Mgr Desmazières. The door left open

1. "L'ordination sacerdotale de J. Vanier, Votum du Cardinal Paul Philippe", March 9th 1977, ACDF.

2. Decree of Feria IV, May 11th 1977, ACDF.

by the Holy Office in 1956 closes itself. For J. Vanier, for whom his faithfulness to T. Philippe has taken precedence since 1952 over his faithfulness to the Church, this decision puts a final end to a desire he has cherished for more than 25 years.

After presenting the way the approach was conducted, let us consider one last point, the elements pertaining to J. Vanier's notion of the priesthood. He explains it several times during the procedure. The letter he sends to Mgr Desmazières on January 18th and the attached report present a detailed account of the way he conceives of his call to the priesthood within L'Arche. This allows to perceive the continuity of his vision with that of the "years of waiting" prior to the founding of L'Arche, but also to measure his evolutions in the context of his success as preacher and founder of L'Arche. In his letter, this is how he presents the sense that this calling to the priesthood has for him as a prolongation of his itinerary at L'Arche:

To me, this calling appears to lead to a closer union with Jesus, Lamb of God and Eternal Priest. It calls me to the service of the Eucharist and the Church and to the service of my brothers and sisters at L'Arche. This is why it seems to me, for one thing, that He calls me to become a priest. He gives a new sense to the priesthood for me. This is the service He is asking from me, the service that is to unite me more closely to Jesus, increase my love, the service through which I will be more His servant, by uniting me more to the Church. On the other hand, it does not seem to me that He wants me to leave L'Arche. It rather seems to me that He wants me to give more to L'Arche this way, by rooting it deeper into His Church.¹

J. Vanier gives three meanings to his calling. A personal meaning: it is a way for him to be more closely united to Christ and to make love grow in him. Christ is called by the name of Jesus, which creates an impression of emotional proximity. And "Jesus" is the only source referred to here to vouchsafe his calling. He does not mention the role of any other spiritual director or interlocutor. His whole discernment appears to be the fruit of a direct dialog with Jesus. Despite the use of conditionals and of the verb "seem", his approach does not consist in asking for counsel but in informing the Church of Jesus's will. The

1. J. Vanier's letter to Mgr Desmazières, January 21st 1977, ACDF.

second sense somewhat counterbalances this mode of charismatic discernment, since the aim is to underline that his priesthood is (in keeping with its traditional meaning) a way of serving the Church. But, according to the will he attributes to Jesus, his priesthood can serve the Church only through L'Arche. The third sense he gives to his calling is crucial. It is for L'Arche and to anchor it more deeply into the Church that he must become priest. The words he employs in his personal report allow to precise the way he perceives his role:

My new role at L'Arche would have to be determined. Fr T. Philippe has been chaplain since 1964. My role would be to second and help him and to be at the service of the other communities of L'Arche. Over the past one or two years, my chief work has actually been to meet the assistants and help them find their place at L'Arche or elsewhere and commit themselves to Jesus".¹

One thing is surprising: J. Vanier does not shirk from announcing that if he is ordained, his role would be to "second" T. Philippe. One can also see that he perceives his priestly role above all as a confirmation of the one of spiritual guide that he already exercises among the assistants. One is struck by the absence here of any reference to all the other activities that being a priest implies.

He then presents his activity as preacher which, according to him, is a proof of his being called to the priesthood. He describes the birth of the Canadian "Foi et Partage" [Faith and Sharing], which aims at organizing retreats and setting up prayer groups and which he vastly fathered in 1969. More than fifty-odd retreats have taken place since then, in the U.S.A., the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway, France, Belgium and India. He underlines the fact that many bishops have participated in them and support the movement. Drawing the spiritual conclusions of that success, he writes that this is a proof indeed of his calling to the priesthood:

I realize that for a layman, preaching retreats is something totally exceptional. It is normally a priest's privilege. Those retreats have been a deep grace for me. Through them and through a gift from the Holy Spirit, I really could discover God's action on people's hearts. It seems to me that

1. J. Vanier's report on his role at L'Arche sent to Mgr Desmazières, January 18th 1975, ACDF.

this calling is quite in keeping with this gift of Speech that I have been granted with.¹

J. Vanier thus assures that he has received a “gift of Speech”. The use of a capital S will surprise. Is it a way to indicate that he would have received it more intensely than the average? Or to suggest that his speech is no different somehow from the Divine Word? Let us also remark that this “gift of Speech”, in the sense of predication, somehow makes his ordination indispensable since this is one of the priest's attributes *par excellence*. In this sphere like in that of spiritual accompaniment, J. Vanier eventually presents himself as an “almost-priest”, which in his eyes justifies a prompt ordination. This is where we probably find an answer to the questions raised for the 1956-1964 period. Through his ancient desire of being a priest, J. Vanier has got used to exercising some of the latter's functions, basing them on the charismatic register that he uses by instinct. He is asking Rome to complete his charismatic legitimacy by the institutional legitimacy of the priesthood, actually asking the Church authorities to recognize the first one. Whereas this conception obviously appeals to Mgr Desmazières, it is very ill-received by Mgr Benelli. It is this report and the oral explanations he receives from J. Vanier that cause the worries that he expresses in a letter dated July 31st, 1976:

The man has a singular conception of the priesthood he aspires to. He considers himself to be “the father of the disabled” and desires to be ordained as priest for this reason. He to really gives the impressions that he expects to be anointed by the Church much like the king designed by the people is waiting for his consecration. In a long conversation which I happen to have had with him I did not succeed in having him admit that the priest, a member of the *presbyterium*, must be totally available for any service that the one in charge of the community might ask from him for the good of the said community. I am afraid that, for all his generosity, Mr Vanier is a very exclusive man in his ideas, and determined to only do what he wants, much like a mystic who considers himself invested with a mission.²

As we saw, Paul Philippe completely fell in with Mgr Benelli's opinion. Placing it in a longer historical perspective, he underlines how

1. J. Vanier's report on his role at l'Arche sent to Mgr Desmazières, January 18th, 1975, ACDF.

2. Mgr Benelli's letter to Mgr Hamer, July 31st 1976, ACDF.

ancient this conception is with J. Vanier and explains it by T. Philippe's influence. He thus concludes his report by taking up two points pertaining to the continuity of this influence at L'Arche. The first is devoted to “Doubts on J. Vanier's participation in the conduct and erotico-mystical theories of T. Philippe”. Underlining the lack of certainty on the question, he concludes with:

It is our duty to answer this question with the utmost clarity: either at L'Arche or at L'Eau vive, no charge has ever been laid against J. Vanier in the matter of chastity. There however remains a fear: in case he had been “initiated” by T. Philippe to the latter's erotico-mystical theories, will he not be led to put them into practice in his own life some day, as his spiritual father thought he could, or indeed should do it, urged by the Holy Spirit? Let us hope not.¹

We are here hitting upon the limits of what the Roman Congregations knows. But we also perceive Paul Philippe's rigour and insight. He never allows himself to draw conclusions beyond what he can prove, while questioning what needs be questioned. It is in the same spirit that he writes out the last point of his report concerning the “Doubts on the esoteric purpose of priesthood for J. Vanier”:

Supposing T. Philippe initiated J. Vanier to his absurd erotico-mystical theories, for what purpose would he have done it? Would not it be to transmit his own “mission” to his favourite son so that he might take up the torch after his demise? In the 1956 trial, it was denounced by a certain number of women and basically admitted by Fr T. Philippe himself that he was continuing the work of his uncle, Fr T. Dehau, o.p., who supposedly would have founded the “mystic sect”. [...] Today, Fr T. Philippe is aged and ailing and J. Vanier desires to be ordained in order to second him: “My role would be to second him at L'Arche”. But all that was pointed out above gives rise to the fear that he might also second him in his “esoteric mission” and “continue this ministry” after the Fr's death.²

Paul Philippe is both prudent and lucid. Present-day knowledge enables us to confirm that the script suggested here as possible is definitely the one that was ready to be enacted.

1. “L'ordination sacerdotale de J. Vanier, Votum du Cardinal Paul Philippe”, March 9th 1977, ACDF.

2. Ibid.

Conclusion

His biographers and his close circle have often presented J. Vanier as a free man, who knew how to maintain his independence from Church institutions to defend his vision of a Church catering for the poorest and the primacy of a direct relationship with God. Its origin would be the will to respect the socio-religious reality of each community and the primacy of the “message sent by the poor”. According to them, the signs of it would be ecumenism, the inter-religious dimension and the absence of an exclusive dependence on to the Catholic Church. The facts relative to J. Vanier’s priestly vocation analyzed in this chapter enable to shed new light on his relationship to the Church and reveal that his construction as “preacher” and “spiritual witness” originate in the itinerary of a thwarted priestly vocation. It definitely is in the confusion of an identification to the priestly vocation with the compensatory remedy of the prophetic function that J. Vanier progressively becomes the founder and preacher that the world has known. As regards his link with the Church, this chapter reveals how complex and ambiguous it is. It combines an indestructible attachment, a sentiment of rejection and incomprehension, a deep wound, mistrust and the certainty to be in possession of a “hidden” spiritual truth superior to that of the magisterium.

The latter element thus appears to have been the original cause, so far invisible, of the “liberty” obtained at the cost of an unbroken alienation to T. Philippe. This invites to take a fresh look at the way the construction of L’Arche with respect to the Church and more generally to the official religions it comes into contact with, while not forgetting to wonder about the exact role that its founder’s ambivalence and secrets may have played in it. This impact was probably stronger than could be imagined. This in any case what is indicated by J. Vanier’s letter of November 7th, 1991 to his friend Karin Donaldson, in which he mentions the refusal of his last application for ordination and unconsciously echoes the famous phrase “*Ubi episcopus, ibi Ecclesia*”, where the bishop is where the Church is, by inverting it in a formulation that is heretical and sectarian *stricto sensu*, saying that he gives up “losing time to reform the Church” preferring to “be the Church where he is”:

For myself I personally suffered quite a bit
at the hands or feet of the Church.
I was hit around a bit
and not permitted to become a priest.
This goes back nearly 40 years
with a rebound about 16 years ago.
There was no hearing, no trial, no jury,
just a judge judging from hearsay

I was able to walk through all the mess
without too much depression or anger
and then found an incredible freedom.
I feel free inside and loved by Jesus.
I feel called to get on with things
not wasting time trying to reform the Church,
but trying to be Church where I am,
trying to create community and live with my people.
There is my urgency¹.

1. Transcription of a letter from J. Vanier to Karin Donaldson, made and given by her to the Commission.

CHAPTER 4.
Philosopher and theologian

Florian Michel

This chapter aims at characterizing J. Vanier's intellectual culture by notably reviewing his philosophy studies. J. Vanier always signals his years of studies as an important stage in his personal construction:

Fr Thomas had steered me towards Aristotle's writings and I had started studies leading to a Ph.D .in philosophy and theology. In 1962 I defended my thesis on Aristotle's ethics at the Institut catholique de Paris".¹

J. Vanier's biographies never forget to mention this Aristotelian philosophical mooring, although they never develop either the doctrinal aspects² not the occasionally extreme singularity of the usages. By his "culture", J. Vanier appears as a "master"³. But philosophy is also a screen behind which he hides his canonical sanctions of 1956: the philosophical school of L'Eau vive would be, according to him a "tendency" needing "to be crushed"⁴; "doctrinal" and not disciplinary or moral reasons are what would have led to T. Philippe's removal.

In the notes for his classes or talks as well as in his interviews, he musters a few spiritual writers and recognized philosophers to shirk

1. Jean Vanier, *Notre vie ensemble...*, op. cit., 2009, p. 16. Idem, *Le goût du bonheur...*, op. cit., 2000, p. 13-14.

2. Kathryn Spink, op. cit., 1993, p. 41-42. Anne-Sophie Constant, op. cit., 2014, p. 96-98.

3. See for instance Odile Ceyrac's testimony, November 23rd 2019, p. 6: "He also was like an intellectual and spiritual master by his vision, his culture."

4. "Interview de Jean Vanier en octobre 1994", p. 4, APJV.

from the sanctions taken by legitimate authorities and justify his stance. The most striking example actually is his resorting to St Theresa of Avila to “disobey one’s director”¹ and justify disobedience. An erroneous and deceptive interpretation since St Theresa, in her writings, precisely teaches the exact contrary².

Similarly, T. Philippe and J. Vanier call on Cardinal Cajetan, a Dominican theologian, famous as a commentator of St Thomas Aquinas, to privately bypass the canonical sanctions that cannot be criticized publicly. In an interview, J. Vanier thus proposes a very personal, excessive interpretation of a borderline case of moral philosophy:

During all that time between 52 and 63, I was in frequent contact with Fr Thomas. I do not know if he was forbidden from seeing some people. I never asked. [*NB. T. Philippe was under an interdiction to see people, and J. Vanier knew it as the previous chapter showed.*] Fr Thomas pointed out a text by Cajetan, in which Cajetan poses the question: can a priest who had been forbidden to say Mass say it secretly? And Cajetan says yes, he can even have a servant provided the latter is a friend.³

1. “Sainte Thérèse d’Avila et l’obéissance”, undated typed note, APJV : “Towards the end of her life, St Theresa admits the possibility of disobeying one’s director to obey a revelation.”

2. on this point, which is no trifling detail, as it so well shows the conscious distortion of the sources of spirituality: read Marie-Eugène de l’Enfant-Jésus, ocd, *Je veux voir Dieu*, Éditions du Carmel, 1949, and especially see chapter 8 on spiritual direction. The last point of the chapter bears on disobedience, p. 262-263: “The will outwardly expressed [by a representative of the Church] must always be preferred over all the inward signs.” See also Hubert Borde, “Révélations privées et obéissance au directeur spirituel selon Thérèse d’Avila (Sixièmes demeures, ch. 9). Notule”, June 2022: “La Madre explains elsewhere (cf. *Vida, Fondations*), in substance, that it is always better to obey one’s spiritual director than one’s private revelations or one’s own will. For in the order of Providence, God will anyway see to it and modify the judgment of the spiritual director to whom one confides one’s spiritual life. God will not durably let a director misguide a highly graced souls, but will transform his discernment, by guiding both the directed soul and the spiritual director through the action of his Holy Spirit. Theresa often experienced it in her life (cf. *Vida ou Fondations*), the various ecclesial authorities she was turning to (confessors, spiritual directors, bishops, theologians) could sometimes order or recommend things contrary to what the Christ ordered or recommended in her inward revelations. Theresa of d’Avila would always obey the said authorities and subsequently saw the decisions or judgments of those authorities modified in the sense of the Christ’s words.”

3. “Interview de Jean Vanier en octobre 1994”, p. 8, APJV.

The precise extract from this comment of Cajetan’s text on the “unfair excommunication” of an innocent priest, which is a comment on the *Theologica Summa*, Ila Ilae, q. 70, a. 4, n. III, has been found in J. Vanier’s personal archives:

If it is evident that an unfair sentence has been pronounced against me, Cajetan writes, or if it is impossible to me at present or ever to prove my innocence, I am not forbidden to celebrate Mass in secret. [...] An unfair condemnation is no condemnation.”¹

We can very directly measure here how J. Vanier’s behaviour is both shaped and justified by the intellectual environment in which he lives. This also permits to measure the gap between the exact sense of the texts referred to and the biased uses that are made of them². The wider question that is posed is to know whether what J. Vanier is going to live is inspired by his intellectual environment or whether the partial and flawed interpretations of major spiritual and philosophical authors (Theresa of Avila, Cajetan) are a way of justifying what he is living.

As concerns J. Vanier, several elements of a different nature essentially intervene. On the one hand, there is the influence of the Aristotelian philosophy and the happiness ethics and on the other hand an interpretation of St Paul’s thought on the ethics of life under the Spirit. Those two elements do not bear in the same way on his emotional behaviour. We would like to precise two different theses: Aristotle’s philosophy is inoperative to prevent J. Vanier from straying and may even foster

1. Translation by T. Philippe or Jean Vanier, APJV. Cajetan’s text: “Quaestio LXX, Articulus IV” is published in latin in the Leonine edition, p. 120-121.

2. Cajetan’s text is then commenting on Thomas Aquinas’s *Theologica Summa*, Ila Ilae question 70, article 4, entitled: “Is bearing a false witness a mortal sin?”. Thomas Aquinas’s reflection in no way bears upon “the unfair excommunication of a priest” but more generally on the injustice committed by a witness (this is the title of question 70) and on perjury (q. 70, article 4). It is Cajetan, and not St Thomas, who introduces the development mentioned about the innocent priest excommunicated on the basis of a false witness. T. Philippe and J. Vanier keep the conclusion of the passage, which comforts them in their practices: bypassing the sanctions, secret meetings, private masses despite the suspension; they conversely carefully avoid, whether publicly or privately, to pose the fundamental question of “false witnesses”, the source of Thomas Aquinas’s moral reflection. The testimonies on which the Holy Office based its judgment are not “false” – even T. Philippe and J. Vanier did not challenge them.

deviance; we can also observe a theological justification of some deviances stemming from a twisted interpretation of a life under the Spirit that would be “above” moral law.

Fifteen years of J. Vanier's life are spent under the sign of philosophical and theological studies. They start in September 1950 at L'Eau vive and he follows them until June 15th, 1962, when he defends his Ph.D. thesis, the exact title of which is: “Happiness as the principle and end of Aristotelian ethics” and which is published in February 1965¹.

Below philosophy, a thesis entails what might be called *social effects*. It gives status to the “Ph.D. student”, then transforms the young “doctor” into an “author”. Vanier thus presents the rather uncommon situation of being all at once a naval officer (chapter 1), an almost-priest (chapter 3) and a doctor of philosophy. The officer is attributed *leadership* qualities, the priest's privilege is the charismatic, prophetic, sacramental word and the doctor of philosophy is associated with the word of authority, knowledge, teaching as well as with a form of wisdom and discernment.

To J. Vanier, after L'Eau vive was condemned and he failed in his priesthood project, his doctor's degree in moral philosophy appears as a lifesaver and, in a sense, as an alibi. We can thus remember that T. Philippe rather cynically presented “the moral thesis” as a “screen”.

For Georges Vanier, in a letter to John XXIII dating from March 1959, the thesis erases the troubles from the time of L'Eau vive: “Jean prays more while further developing his theological and philosophical studies. He is currently working on a Ph.D. for Institut catholique de Paris”². In 1965-66, J. Vanier has similarly sent his published thesis to Cardinal Ottaviani and uses it to present a budding L'Arche³. The doctor's degree is thus meant to correct the perception from Rome, give a token of seriousness and... permit to receive young women.

1. Jean Vanier, *Le bonheur, principe et fin de la morale aristotélicienne*, DDB, Paris & Bruges, 1965, 499 p.

2. See Georges Vanier's address to John XXIII in favour of J. Vanier, March 7th 1959 and J. Vanier's letter to the Secretariat of State January 28th 1975 ; ACDF..

3. Letter from J. Vanier to Cardinal Ottaviani, February 6th 1966, ACDF.

Even if J. Vanier's thesis seems a piece in the strategy of a larger board game in the way T. Philippe writes about it, it is also something else. The product of intelligence, a thesis, in a sense, shapes its author. The *intimate* effect of this research is obvious as for J. Vanier. His anthropology, his grammar, his vocabulary of happiness but also of pleasure, desire, virtue, temperance, concupiscence, etc. will from now on bear the brand of his doctoral work. His thesis is a touchstone in his personal construction. “This research on the basis of Aristotelian ethics has vastly enlightened me and has helped me grasp the link between ethics, psychology and spirituality”¹. “Aristotle has opened my intelligence and taught me to marvel at the truth”². This does not mean that J. Vanier's personal ethics coincides with Aristotle's pre-evangelical ethics. He clearly delineates the “limits” of Aristotelian ethics, but Aristotle's categories and principles are the very material that frames J. Vanier's thought and writings. At the threshold of the years 2000, he thus publishes a book of popular philosophy on “The Taste of happiness: the basis of ethics with Aristotle”³.

In this perspective, it is important to briefly precise some aspects of Aristotelian ethics, which is a type of “eudemonism”, an “ethics of happiness”: for Aristotle, happiness is the final incentive of human action. At the turn of the 1950-1960s, Aristotle's ethics becomes a fashionable topic. It is renewed, just prior to J. Vanier's thesis, by a flourish of scholarly publications⁴. Jacques Maritain, for instance, whom Vanier had met and read while at L'Eau vive, was recalling that Aristotle's ethics has its limits and deficiencies⁵, even if he recognizes it as “the truest and most authentic, most loyal of purely philosophical ethical theories”. It is

1. Jean Vanier, *Le goût du bonheur...*, op. cit., 2000, p. 14.

2. Ibid. p.510

3. Jean Vanier, *Le goût du bonheur : au fondement de la morale avec Aristote*, Paris, Presses de la Renaissance, 2000, 2007 [new ed.] ; France-Loisirs, 2007 ; Le Grand Livre du Mois, 2010 ; Albin Michel, 2018.

4. René-Antoine Gauthier & Jean-Yves Jolif, translation of *Nicomachian Ethics*, 4 vol., Louvain, Paris, 1958-1959 ; Jules Tricot, *Éthique à Nicomaque*, Paris, Vrin, 1959 ; Pierre Aubenque, *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote*, Paris, PUF, 1962 ; idem, *La prudence chez Aristote*, Paris, PUF, 1963.

5. Jacques Maritain, *La philosophie morale. Examen historique et critique des grands systèmes*, Paris, Gallimard 1960, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 11, p. 295-328.

“inefficient ethics”, according to Maritain, who signals both how appropriate, but how incomplete and risky the principles of Aristotelian ethics are:

- Aristotle does not sufficiently explore the notion of “fault”. For him it is not a breach of the “common rule”, simply what turns away from “happiness”;
- For Maritain, Aristotle sticks to a diminished concept of the “norm”, which has lost “the sacred character it originally had” and its binding aspect;
- For Aristotle, virtue is both a means towards an end and an integral part of a happy life. It is this double function that Maritain targets as problematical: “By aiming at the end, the means thus becomes part of the very notion and a constituent of the end at which it aims”¹.
- For Maritain, natural law is what enables to break this vicious circle, by reincorporating an objective norm;
- Aristotle’s ethics is only valid for a “a tiny aristocracy” of philosophers for, in order to be happy, one needs to have friends, be in good health, be free, have money to be able to enjoy one’s freedom, have free time so as to practice philosophy, have pleasures, etc. The inaccessible dimension of happiness according to Aristotle’s definition participates in the fact that his ethics is inefficient. If the aim is not accessible, it loses of its capacity of leading to action;
- Aristotle’s ethics eventually leads into “a sort of transcendental selfishness” for Maritain, who precises that for Aristotle, “happiness” becomes “the subjective face of good”, in the sense that in his conception of happiness “the notion of good falls back on the subject”. If the supreme good is a person’s happiness, the final cause of action is “a good taken subjectively”. What can be observed in Aristotle’s ethics is an “impossible deliverance from oneself”.

Reading the list of Aristotle’s deficiencies that Maritain makes up, it is difficult not to draw a parallel, with all due prudence, between Aristotelian ethics and the *morals of abuse* that can be observed in the Philippe brothers’ milieu. Abuses remain a deviation of Aristotle’s ethics, all the more so as it is revisited here by a Christian with a Thomistic

1. Jacques Maritain, *op. cit.*, 1960, p. 305.

culture. There is no relation from cause to effect, but Aristotelian ethics here seems, in a sense and with prudence, a permissive philosophical frame, permeable to the culture of abuse. When not balanced by an objective norm, the “ethics of happiness” may not remain able to fulfil its role of a compass for action. In other words, J. Vanier’s studies in moral philosophy do not constitute an antidote to disorderly practices but, in a sense, their bases.

J. Vanier’s philosophical studies (1950-1956)

Before his doctor’s degree, J. Vanier follows a rather scrappy philosophical curriculum as far as institutions are concerned, but rather well-focused in spirit around a few classical authors (Aristotle, St Thomas Aquinas, Cajetan, Jean de Saint-Thomas). He begins his studies of philosophy and theology at L’Eau vive and Le Saulchoir before continuing at the Institut catholique de Paris. For the 1950-1956 period, the programmes are known, as well as the names of the principal lecturers and professors: Jacques Maritain, Olivier Lacombe, Fr Lallement, Jacques de Monléon, Jean Daujat, Albert Sandoz, Marie-Dominique Philippe, etc¹. At Le Saulchoir J. Vanier follows the philosophy courses meant for the Dominican novices.

Two *curricula vitae* of J. Vanier² can be found in Canon Lallement’s archives. The first one, handwritten, dates from March 1955, the second, typed, dates from the first semester of 1956.

We give it complete here:

1. On this point, see A. Mourges, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 124-125.
2. Fonds Lallement, Archives ICP.

STUDIES COMPLETED BY M. J. VANIER

- 1950-1951. *De Deo Uno* (Le Saulchoir)
- 1951-1952. Logique, cosmologie et Histoire grecque (Le Saulchoir)
- 1952-1953. 3^e année de philosophie (Institut catholique)
- 1953-1954. Une année de scolarité pour habilitation au doctorat en philosophie (Institut catholique). Cours de métaphysique et de théologie naturelle.
- 1954-1955. 1954-1955. 2^e année de théologie.
 Dogme : sacrements
 Morale : justice, tempérance
 Droit canon
 Morale pratique : confession
 Histoire de la doctrine
 Exégèse : 1/ Nouveau Testament
 2/ Ancien Testament
 Histoire de l'Église
- 1955-1956. Dogme : Trinité, Création, anges
 Morale : péché, loi, grâce
 Droit canon
 Morale pratique
 Histoire de la doctrine
 Exégèse : Nouveau Testament
 Ancien Testament

At the time, the syllabus is based on the current *ratio studiorum*: three years for the baccalaureate, followed by a foundation year called “year of habilitation”, which permits to enlist as a PhD. student. It appears from these documents that between 1950 and 1956 J. Vanier follows studies that may be called *clerical*, given the institutions frequented and the important place of theology in the curriculum. Let us also note that J. Vanier's CVs are associated in Lallement's archives

with the letters of recommendation he sends to the Archbishop of Quebec, Mgr Roy, so that J. Vanier might be ordained as soon as possible. The aim of those CVs is thus to show that those are studies *with a view to* ordination; J. Vanier, Lallement explains, has fulfilled all the studies necessarily to a future priest.

The training J. Vanier had between L'Eau vive, Le Saulchoir and the Institut catholique de Paris guarantees a certain continuity. Let us note in this respect that, as early as 1955-1956, J. Vanier already knows four official members of the jury that passed judgment on his Ph.D. thesis in 1962. Beside Lallement and de Monléon, there is Fr Grenet, who gives lectures at L'Eau vive, as well as Fr Eyselé, Dean of the Faculty in the middle of the 1950s, who, because of this, accepted the enrolment of the L'Eau vive students at the School of Philosophy of the Institut catholique de Paris. All of them were more or less informed of the turmoil at L'Eau vive in the years 1952-1956.

The relationship between J. Vanier and Fr Lallement go beyond the classical relationship of a professor and his Ph.D. student, which must be underlined. As early as the Summer of 1953, J. Vanier is invited at the “Petites Soeurs” (little sisters) of Thomery, a convent founded by Fr Lallement. In 1956, the latter meets General Vanier. Lallement insistently recommends J. Vanier for ordination to the Archbishop of Quebec. He also supports him among the Dominican authorities, the diocesan authorities of Versailles, Paris and Quebec, the Holy Office, etc. After taking part in the 1953 and 1954 Summer Schools at L'Eau vive, Lallement for instance takes the initiative to write a pean of praise to the Bishop of Versailles on August 30th, 1954:

A spirit of faithfulness to the doctrine of the Church prevails at L'Eau vive, together with the will to follow all the directives of the Hierarchy and the desire to be entirely controlled by ecclesiastical authority. [...] I intimately know the one who, with much tact and firmness, exercises the role of elder brother among the students, namely M. J. Vanier. I vastly appreciate his human and supernatural qualities, and especially his apostolic spirit within the deepest docility towards the Church.¹

1. Canon Lallement's letter to Mgr Renard, Bishop of Versailles, August 30th 1954, AICP.

What did Fr Lallement know at the time of the sexual disorders at L'Eau vive? Was he duped, manipulated or an accomplice? In the present state of documentation, the hypothesis of his being blind seems to have to be privileged. Lallement thus joins the list of the churchmen who see nothing and do not try too hard to understand. He starts teaching at L'Eau vive a year after the forced departure of T. Philippe. He seems to ignore the exact facts established by the procedure of the Holy Office, which are never mentioned in the mail that reaches him; he receives second-hand, undetailed information in June 1956 of the closing down of L'Eau vive. He hardly seems anxious to get the necessary precisions when, despite his recommendations, Mgr Roy refuses to ordain J. Vanier in 1956. As an unwavering and inefficient of J. Vanier over the 1954-1956 period, he accepts him as a Ph.D. student in the Autumn of 1957. This acceptance seems a prolongation of the recommendations already given.

Candidate to a Ph.D. (1957-1962)

J. Vanier's thesis is being elaborated in a dialogue with T. Philippe, his spiritual master but also his "master in intelligence"¹; with M.-D. Philippe, professor of philosophy at the University of Fribourg at the time, and with Fr Lallement who, as Professor at the Institut catholique de Paris and supervisor of his thesis, has kept the administrative pieces of the file. Aristotelian ethics is rather quickly identified as the central object of J. Vanier's work.

In his correspondence with T. Philippe between 1956 and 1964, his thesis is often looming at the background of the exchanges. The word "Aristotle" appears about thirty times in the letters, those of "Ph.D." and "thesis" more than eighty times. T. Philippe invites J. Vanier to delve deeper into the "Aristotle project":

It seems to me that [the project] on Aristotle has already taken more shape in your mind. You may perhaps turn to this subject, but completing and developing the last part on what Christianity adds to Aristotle's ethics and making it a little like the second part of your work...²

1. Jean Vanier, preface to T. Philippe, *Des miettes pour tous*, Paris, Saint-Paul, 1994, p. 6-7.

2. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, January 30th 1964, APJV.

At the time, T. Philippe is proofreading the volume before publication¹. He sends "little notes" to J. Vanier to try and direct him towards some questions. Many years after defending his thesis, J. Vanier underlines the fact that its original orientation towards Aristotle comes from T. Philippe: "He was the one who advised me to write a thesis on Aristotle"². What clearly emerges from their correspondence is that T. Philippe seems to play the role of inspirer and prime counsellor. He is very present in the critical apparatus of the thesis³.

Among the people close to J. Vanier, M.-D. Philippe is the only recognized specialist of Aristotle⁴. He is the author of a brief essay of some 50 pages in German on Aristotle, published in 1948⁵. In 1956, he publishes an *Initiation à la philosophie d'Aristote* that will become a classic, one of the first chapters of which is devoted to Aristotle's ethics⁶.

Between 1945 and 1948, in the Fribourg review *Nova et vetera* as well as in the *Revue thomiste*, M.-D. Philippe publishes a series of articles that evidence his recognized competence on Aristotle. J. Vanier quotes those works in his thesis and includes them in his final bibliography. In 1959, M.-D. Philippe offers J. Vanier to publish his first conclusions in the *Revue thomiste*⁷.

As for Fr Lallement, he is in charge of making sure J. Vanier's project succeeds. His job is to guide J. Vanier's, whose correspondence with T. Philippe, the "grey eminence", he seems to be ignorant of. Lallement helps him precise his vocabulary, his method, his writing. Archives enable us to see all the exchanges between the professor and his student. As supervisor of the latter's thesis, Lallement fulfills his task: he clearly warns him that he will not be able to defend his work unless he completes a scrupulous linguistic revision. Before the

1. Ibid.

2. Jean Vanier, *Notre vie ensemble...*, op. cit., p. 510.

3. See the thesis published, DDB, 1965, p. 388, and in the bibliography, p. 466 : T. Philippe, "Spéculation métaphysique et contemplation chrétienne", in Strena Garrigou-Lagrange, *Angelicum*, 1937, Fasc. 1-2.

4. Voir la thèse éditée, DDB, 1965, p. 364-367, p. 464.

5. M. D. Philippe, *Aristoteles*, Bern, A. Francke, 1948.

6. M. D. Philippe, *Initiation à la philosophie d'Aristote*, Paris, Éditions du Vieux Colombier, 1956.

7. J. Vanier's letter to Fr Lallement, December 9th 1959. AICP.

defense, he forces him to give up his conclusion on the links between Aristotelian ethics and Evangelical ethics, which corresponds exactly to a part suggested by T. Philippe.

J. Vanier's letter of January 6th, 1958 is an important chronological landmark. He would like to reassure his supervisor as to the advancement of his readings, but suggests a complete redefinition of his subject. This poses a difficulty. Lallement is professor of metaphysics; Vanier intends to remain under Lallement's supervision, but had rather work on questions of moral philosophy rather than on a question of metaphysics. "Since my parents left in September [1957], he writes, I have continued my intellectual work". By that time he is reading St Thomas, in particular his comments on Aristotle, Jean de Saint-Thomas, Cajetan, Garrigou-Lagrange. He carries on:

This brings me to tell you about my Ph.D. thesis, which does not progress as fast as you might wish perhaps. I confess that after those months of work and prayer, I feel more inclined toward ethics. But will you allow me to change subjects? If yes, do you think Fr Eyselé will allow me to work on a thesis in ethics with you? If he does not, I could maybe do something combining metaphysics and ethics? The subject that would have most interested me perhaps risks to be too vast for a school of philosophy: it would be a comparison between Aristotelian, Christian and humanist (humanist: as from the Renaissance or from M. Maritain) or Marxist and existentialist morality".

Vanier enumerates a certain number of points that he would be brought to tackle: the moral imperative, the desire of beatitude, moral law, morality and duty, the role of tradition, morality and humanism, prudence. There is no question at this stage to devote the whole thesis to an examination of Aristotle, but to proceed by comparison to examine a certain number of moral questions¹.

The two men meet in Paris a few weeks later. In the Spring of 1958, we can remark a new inflection of the subject:

The little conversation we had on the law a few weeks ago has proved very fruitful? And the little answer to a question on *IIaIIae*, q 26 has put me on an important working track: the difference between Aristotelian morality and Platonist morality, which seems to me to be the basis of present-day

1. J. Vanier's letter to Lallement, January 6th 1958, ADM

humanism. Is not Plato eventually seeking for the ideal man, who, in his shape, is similar to God? In Aristotle's thought, man resembles God in his finality. And man's perfection is to be found in an operation that unites him to the ultimate end, God.¹

It is only in the Summer of 1959 that the Aristotelian bend is now definitely taken. It is clearly expressed in a letter that J. Vanier sends to Lallement on July 19th:

Upon arriving [in Fatima] I found the little house half-built – much to my surprise – and I could move in the very day of the feast of the Sacred Heart. Three years after the feast of the Sacred Heart when the bishop of Versailles came to announce the decisions of the Holy Office, which for me were at the origin of so many graces. This little divine "coincidence" moved me a lot. [...] I could seriously progress in my work on Aristotle. I have completed two technical studies, one on the word *καλον* and the other on the word *βούλησις*. As you perhaps know, the moderns (Tricot, Gauthier) translate the latter word by wish and (inefficient wish) and the school of Louvain refuses to admit that Aristotle discovered the notion of will. It was therefore necessary to study the word in order to find the proper French word to translate it.

Let us note, *en passant*, the phrase on "the decisions of the Holy Office", "at the origin of so many graces": is this a sign of J. Vanier's outward obedience to those decisions, the validity of which he otherwise questions? He then expatiates at length on the translation of the Greek words. We learn that the secretarial work of the thesis will be done in Fatima. The bibliography is being organized. The plan of the thesis being prepared: "I will send you a little plan of the thesis, which is still liable to many alterations"². The project is to come back to Aristotle's text itself to better grasp his ethics, whereas there is no "absolutely perfect translation of his works"³.

In December 1959, J. Vanier sends the first elements of his thesis: "My dear Father, here is the work at last. Please excuse me for being so late. Attached are the two appendices on Plato and Aristotle"⁴. This first

1. J. Vanier's letter to Canon Lallement, April 3rd 1958 [postmark], ADM.

2. J. Vanier's letter to D. Lallement, July 19th 1959, AICP.

3. "Plan et notes sur la thèse", 6 typed pages, undated, but the document is announced in the letter of July 19th 1959, AICP.

4. J. Vanier's letter to D. Lallement, December 4th 1959, AICP

delivery brings about abundant exchanges between the two men. The principal problem is the acceptations of Greek words and the translations proposed by J. Vanier:

Dearest friend, let us unite in the love of our Mother and in joy? I have just received your manuscripts and I immediately had a look at the study on βούλησις (perhaps because it is the shorter one). It is interesting and useful but I want at once to let you know that in my view you will have to take it up again. It is not possible to translate βούλησις in general by "desire". Desire is a particular act of will.¹

J. Vanier writes a long letter back at once, with a comparative comment on Aristotle and St Thomas about the words *intendere, desiderare, velle, concupiscentia*, etc.: "I might fairly quickly change those errors and perhaps soften or modify the conclusion"².

Fr Lallement immediately acknowledges receipt:

Dearest friend, thanks for your letter. [...] What you tell me in your letter I received this morning, about your use of the word "desire" does not entirely enlightens me, and even poses me new questions. Let us try to sort things out.

Five pages follow on the comparative vocabulary of Aristotle and St Thomas: *desiderium, appetitus, concupiscentia, amor, concupiscentiae*, etc.

I admit, Lallement concludes in this letter, that I have been a little... shall we say irritated, by the constant juxtaposition, in the translations of your study, of βούλησις, desire, wish... This what explains that at one stage I used a blue pencil. You make too many concessions, especially to Tricot, but this obviously poses the question of the method you must adopt.³

On December 30th 1959, J. Vanier acknowledges receipt: "I quite understand your irritation? I will explain why so many 'désire' have slipped in"⁴. There ensues an argumentation on the question of the translations.

1. D. Lallement's letter to J. Vanier, December 8th 1959, AICP.

2. J. Vanier's letter to D. Lallement, December 16th 1959, AICP.

3. D. Lallement's letter to Jean Vanier, December 21st 1959, AICP.

4. J. Vanier's letter to D. Lallement, December 30th 1959, AICP.

The work follows in that direction and progresses at a good pace throughout 1960. The main problem is now the language, the very writing of the thesis: "I am convinced that unless a serious effort of revision is made, my colleagues will judge your language severely"¹. By the Spring of 1962, the thesis is completed. It has been re-read and put into academic French by a series of Carmelite nuns and good friends.

The defense of the thesis (June 15th, 1962)

In itself, the defense of J. Vanier's thesis is an event. He becomes a *doctor*. The defense takes place without any special difficulty and is even described, in the letters and accounts, as a triumph of sorts. The archives have kept J. Vanier's and Fr Lallement's speeches.

A few weeks before, as required, Fr Lallement sends the "thesis report" to Dean Châtillon. A letter is attached, to highlight an important point. Upon Lallement's request, J. Vanier has curtailed a fragment of his thesis, on which we will come back later because this very fragment happens to raise a series of rather delicate moral questions:

I think I have already told you that Mr Vanier had given up what had been envisaged at one stage: that, in his conclusion, he should develop a comparison between Aristotelian and Christian ethics. Those pages would actually have been anything but a conclusion. They should have been studied from a theological angle and proceeded quite differently from the method used in the rest of the work. Mr Vanier therefore limited himself to say in a few words why he was not considering this question, which he will be able to take up again some day.²

The thesis report itself retraces the sense of the work completed. As his job requires, Fr Lallement supports the candidate he is presenting³. Concretely, the work is a volume of over 400 pages, including a long introduction and two appendices ("Aristotle's ethics and the immortality of the *voûς*", "Final causality in Aristotle and in Plato").

1. D. Lallement's letter to J. Vanier, October 31st 1960, rough copy, AICP.

2. D. Lallement's letter to Dean Châtillon, April 17th 1962, AICP.

3. Thesis report written by Fr D. Lallement, April 16th 1962, AICP.

On Friday June 15th, 1962 at 3 p.m., in the Salle des Actes of the Institut catholique de Paris, J. Vanier defends his thesis in front of a jury known in advance, consisting of Messrs Lallement, de Monléon, Eyselé and Grenet, to whom the Dean and the Rector of Institut catholique add themselves at the last moment. Lallement's speech is conform to what is expected from a thesis supervisor, as for both the support and the mild criticism. J. Vanier's, who sums up his philosophical efforts in a few paragraphs, is the most lively on that defense day. Right from the beginning he lays the stress on "moral perfection". In some philosophical circles, he says, this perfection is conceived of as "the acquisition of natural, spiritual as well as physical goods." "The perfect man is the one who, being master of himself, owns the moral virtues". He is cultured and moreover possesses riches and natural goods in harmony with his way of life. Morality here consists in successive acquisitions. Vanier is opposed to this conception which, according to him, "has untoward consequences for Christian life". This is how he sums up the question he has tried to solve:

Is morality simply meant to provide the person with formal fullness, or does the person on the contrary find his or her goodness and perfection in being atuned to God and to men?

The disjunction is not self-evident. But for Vanier the first branch of the questioning sends back to Plato's ethics, "a closed-in humanist morality", i.e. one in which "the finality of man is considered only as a formal fullness without any other ordering." The second branch sends back to Aristotle: human morality is atuned to its final cause, which is God. This is the one that J. Vanier keeps. This issue, posed this way, actually seems to bypass the gradual process of education to virtue and moral improvement through the acquisition of virtues. Vanier expresses his views in a few lines: moral perfection is not in the "acquisitions", not even that of the virtues, but solely in being atuned to God. What is missing here is a form of verification that one is well atuned to God through the acquisition and practice of the virtues.

J. Vanier anyhow continues by describing his method. There were, he explains, many contradictory interpretations of Aristotle's ethics; it was necessary to go back to the sources and to the texts of the master himself. His thesis falls into three parts:

- In the first part, J. Vanier asks himself what happiness is for Aristotle and how happiness is connected with outside good, pleasure or time. Happiness is described as "the best human activity"; "the other human activities are good only if they are atuned one way or another with this prime activity".
- The main question is the second part is: what is human happiness at the moral level? "Aristotle laid the bases for a philosophy of love" by including "a real and efficient atuning to other men". "The acme of virtue is to do good to everyone", Aristotle says.
- In the 3rd part – what eventually is true human happiness for Aristotle? – J. Vanier "ponders on the nature of man's highest activity which, according to Aristotle, constitutes human happiness and is the contemplation of God.

J. Vanier concludes his presentation by underlining how necessary it is to overstep Aristotle's ethics:

Aristotle's ethics, as ethics of reason, ethics of the natural law, shows its limits and deficiencies indeed, but we believe that these eventually stem from the fact that man has actually not been made for philosophical contemplation or purely moral activities, but has been made to be God's beloved child, to live through the grace of divine love itself. Aristotle could not conceive of the immensity of God's mercy.

A very strange conclusion indeed, in that it totally strays from the object itself (Aristotle's ethics) and from the philosophical method itself. For his Ph.D. thesis, J. Vanier receives a pass "*cum maxima laude*", which, though honorable, is not excellent. The *Revue de l'Institut catholique* published an account of the defense¹. In it we learn that "Mgr le Recteur [Mgr Blanchet] "had managed to spare part of his time to attend the initial exposés and the first skirmishes". The Rector's presence as well as the Dean's does illustrate the fact that recognition is at stake: the one defending his thesis is the son of the Governor general of Canada and the institution is making him a doctor of him.

1. Account of the defense, *Revue de l'Institut catholique de Paris*, 1962, vol. 5-6, p. 12-13.

The thesis as published (1962-1965): an ambiguous conclusion?

Once the thesis is defended, the time comes, as is wont, for reaping the fruits: lecturing at universities on the basis of the acquired competences, publication of the work and reception of the research in a broad sense. The sole term of January to March 1964 sees the beginning and the end of a new course of moral philosophy at the faculty of philosophy at St Michael's College, University of Toronto. The experience of teaching in higher education mentioned by J. Vanier's biographers and referred to in his autobiographical writings¹ is important as a harbinger of his further humbling down from the school of philosophy for the mental deficiency of the residents of L'Arche, from the university students to the disabled, from the capital of Ontario to a lost village in the Oise region, something like passing from "worldly glory" to "Christlike humility". On the basis of his doctor's degree and his teaching experience, J. Vanier is held as "an academic". He is sometimes presented as such. This is the opening of a new path, after those of the army and the clergy, but he does not take it. Concretely St Michael's College is part of the University of Toronto. Its directors are Basilians, a congregation of French origin that has trained quite a number of teachers of medieval philosophy for North America since Étienne Gilson founded the "Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies" there in 1929. J. Vanier leaves for Toronto with the blessing of T. Philippe, as well as with a course outline and notes that the latter has written out for him². In this transmission, one can probably see the will of the master to influence a disciple who has himself become a master.

A few echoes of J. Vanier's teaching at Toronto can be found in the archives: "Very successful teacher", "The students are numerous". J. Vanier's links with Toronto will be important – publications, lectures – for the history of L'Arche to come. Only months after his return from Toronto, L'Arche is founded in Trosly in the Summer of 1964, even if the idea had emerged earlier, in December 1963. In 1969, it is in Toronto that the first community of L'Arche in North America ("Daybreak") is founded.

1. See for instance : Jean Vanier, preface to T. Philippe, *Des miettes pour tous*, Paris, Saint-Paul, 1994, p. 7. : "i was then teaching philosophy at St Michael's College at the University of Toronto.

2. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, January 30th [1964], APJV.

The volume issuing from the thesis is published in February 1969. The work is dedicated: "To my parents, with gratitude". This is all the more justified since the correspondence exchanged by Jean and his parents as well as the family accounts to be found in the family archives show that his parents have financed the costs of publishing. Out of prudence as much as dissimulation, there is no mention of T. Philippe who, as we saw, nevertheless plays a fundamental part in the genesis of the thesis. Between the thesis as defended and the thesis as published, the differences are stylistic above all.

At the philosophical level, the very last pages of the conclusion must be closely scrutinized. J. Vanier was taking up again the question of the true happiness of "the reasonable being", Aristotle's definition of man, i.e. the "good in the activities of reason", "the exercise of moral virtues", "the possession of truly human goods" such as friendship and honours", "happiness as the morality of law" and "law as far as it is reasonable"¹. *En passant*, J. Vanier was criticizing Jacques Maritain without naming him: "Certain modern thinkers judge the Stagirite's ethics too aristocratic, inefficient, impracticable"² and was coming back on the issue of the "true limits" of "any rational ethics"³.

In a few paragraphs, J. Vanier has to wrap up his work and sum up the pages suggested by T. Philippe that he could not include. The question posed at this stage of reflection bears on how a Christian can strike a balance between reason within free will and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There is hardly a more classical question and as for St Thomas Aquinas's work, it was developed by Yves Congar⁴. For J. Vanier, in the last two pages of his work, Christian morality does not seem to be so much relevant to ethics and philosophy as to the sole faith and mystic. Literally, his position is rather prudent: his writing becomes interrogative and allusive, something he remains aware of:

1. J. Vanier, op. cit., DDB, 1965, p. 412, 413, 414.

2. J. Vanier, op. cit., DDB, 1965, p. 420.

3. J. Vanier, thesis quoted, 1962, p. 293 ; op. cit, 1965, p. 421.

4. See for instance Yves Congar, "Le Saint Esprit dans la théologie thomiste de l'agir moral", Actes du Congrès international pour le 7e centenaire de saint Thomas d'Aquin, L'agir morale, Edizione Dominicane Italiana, Napoli, 1974, p. 9-19.

In order to deeply grasp the limits of Aristotelian ethics at the level of principles, must not one consider those limits not in the light of a morality that wants to remain at the sole level of natural reason (while still drawing its inspiration from the Gospels and the saints' writings, without however explaining the mystery of faith proper), but in that of Christian morality itself?

But one cannot refer to Christian morality without mentioning what is essential, and even mysterious, in it, namely the gift of the Holy Spirit to each Christian the moment he is baptized, a gift that, through the Cross and the death of the old man, leads him to an ever more total union with Christ, the unique Saviour of mankind.

Reducing Christianity to a simple prop for the practice of virtue and the natural law amounts to vastly truncating it. But is not bringing in faith data and mysteries that exceed reason and, in the very words of St Paul, may seem madness to the Greeks, leaving the proper sphere of moral philosophy? It is exactly for this reason that we have decided to put off till later this comparison between Aristotelian morality and Christian morality¹.

Reading this conclusion, notwithstanding the "postponing" of the assessment of how Christian morality articulates with natural morality, which is the sign of a non-resolution, one might have a feeling of relative banality. Christian morality is not natural morality. The Gospel is not just a reminder of moral and religious demands, but first of all an invitation to step into God's intimacy. For St Thomas, the supernatural character of faith only strengthens the demands of rationality and morality, whereas in Vanier's conclusion we perceive a *departure*, a break between rational ethics and Evangelical ethics. For Vanier, the door is open to a passage from ethics to mysticism *without a mediation*, without taking morality into account at the level of natural reason. Hence we may conclude that for Vanier, the hypothesis is posed of the theoretical possibility of a Christian mysticism without a morality grounded on reason, since Christian morality would be grounded on mysticism and since "the new law of divine Love infinitely exceeds anything the mind can conceive, being an absolutely free fruit of God's mercy"².

J. Vanier's writing, through loose, is also in interrogative mode, but he nevertheless clearly lets it to be understood that Christian ethics is

1. The passage is identical, to the comma, in both the thesis of 1962, p. 293 and the volume published in 1965, p. 420-421.

2. Jean Vanier, op. cit., 1962, p. 294 ; op. cit., 1965, p. 421

not so much grounded on human reason as on "the gift of the Holy Spirit" and on the "ever more total union to Jesus". Thus formulated, the phrase is both true and false, according to the reader's level of reading and degree of comprehension. As a Christian, how indeed can one not agree that the new law of God's Love infinitely exceeds reason? But exactly as grace does not abolish nature, the new law does not abolish natural morality, grounded on reason. As regards moral issues, a form of disjunction between *fides* and *ratio* is perceptible in J. Vanier's thesis. At this stage, can we go thus far in interpretation? Must we bring in some nuance by saying that the way he articulates faith and reason needs to be pondered on, envisage the fact that this might be an essential difficulty for him in order to distance himself from the teaching received from T. Philippe over the previous years and that, in some sense, the examination of the thesis comes too late?

Whatever the case may be, for St Thomas the regulation of the act, contrary to this, precisely depends on reason. Commenting on St Thomas Aquinas's ethics, Gilson reminds us that "reason is what must be consulted first of all on any problem concerning good moral conduct and what reason first does is to make sure of the nature of the act and of its object"¹. There is no trace of this rationalism reconciled with the law of grace – "objective norms", "the measure of reason", "uprightness of intelligence" – under J. Vanier's pen. To highlight the difficulty differently and more directly, the formulas of the conclusion of J. Vanier's thesis do not prevent the sexual relationships of T. Philippe's disciples among themselves since the latter has "received" a "private revelation". Because this revelation has been "verified" and the gifts of the Holy Spirit and not reason are what ethics is grounded on, the question of the "morality" of the acts committed is solved.

J. Vanier's Ph.D. work meets with mixed reception. It hardly gets noticed on the whole, but two reviews have been published. The first,

1. Saint Thomas d'Aquin, Textes sur la morale traduits et commentés par Étienne Gilson, Paris, Vrin, 1998, p. 378. The first edition of this volume was published under the title of Saint Thomas d'Aquin, Paris, Gabalda, 1925, "Collection : Les moralistes chrétiens, textes et commentaires".

written by a specialist of Aristotle, is a merciless criticism¹. The second is by a professor of moral philosophy of Canadian origin, trained at Toronto's St Michael's College. It is a glowing review, but with significant reservations in the detail².

A fragment cut off: two distinct moralities?

One last point must at last be underlined regarding the thesis, or more exactly regarding the unpublished passage of the thesis. J. Vanier actually intended to devote the last part of his reflection to a comparison between Aristotle's ethics and that of the Gospel. We saw that Canon Lallement had dissuaded him to do so before his defense. There however exist more than 80 pages, some typed, others handwritten, crossed out and unpublished, in the archives of the "Petites Sœurs" of Thomery³ under the general title of "The limits of Aristotle's ethics compared to the ethics of the Gospel".

In connection with the previous remarks, we must observe that, in this mass of texts, the issue of morality and reason is never tackled specifically, with the same clarity as by St Thomas, Gilson or Maritain. J. Vanier nevertheless refers to it allusively by opposing Jewish ethics, "an ethics of faith and hope", for instance, or the morality of the Gospel, "an ethics of charity and supernatural love", with Aristotelian ethics, a natural morality grounded on reason and metaphysics.

In the first point of those pages, entitled "Christian morality is a morality of charity", J. Vanier proposes a very personal, and very strange, formulation of the starting point of Christian ethics:

The perfect Christian, that is to say "the spiritual man who judges of everything but is judged by no one" (1 Cor. 2, 15), the "petit" (small one) to whom God revealed His secrets does not at first have confidence in himself, in his concrete nature, in his aspirations or capacities; he is too deeply

1. René-A. Gauthier. "Vanier (Jean). Le bonheur principe et fin de la morale aristotélicienne", *Revue des études grecques*, tome 78, fasc. 371-373, July-December 1965. p. 694-697.

2. Vernon J. Bourke, *The Modern Schoolman*, volume 44, issue 3, mars 1967, p. 298-299

3. J. Vanier, "Les limites de la morale d'Aristote par rapport à la morale de l'évangile", ADM.

aware of the ravages of original sin in him; his first attitude is therefore to be confident in God's gifts, in the latter's omnipotence, in the service of His mercy and of predestination. He is not at first conscious, as the Aristotelian is, of his perfection but of his poverty, for he knows that he has nothing by himself and that his whole perfection stems from the Cross and the gratuity of the divine choice that gave him the Spirit. This trust in God does not immediately confer self-mastery, but rather inspires a defiance of oneself, that is to say humility and the penance that ensues: it gives no rectified self-complacency but an attitude of gratitude indeed for the kindness of God who saves and loves.¹

Apart from St Paul's quotation on "the spiritual man judged by no one", we recognize some classical themes of Christianity, rather common too in T. Philippe's theology (humbleness, poverty, humility, annihilation of the self, the broken man saved by the Cross, etc.) and largely used in the vocabulary of L'Arche.

Further down on the same fragment, we notice ambiguous formulas on the "two distinct moralities", buttressed on quotations from Jean de Saint-Thomas and Cajetan. The issue tackled is "the morality of saints": is it identical to common morality? How does the morality of the elect articulate with that of common people? J. Vanier then underlines that there are "two distinct moralities", without indicating if they are liable to be in contradiction in some cases:

It must be noted at first that this presence of the Holy Spirit animating a Christian in charity may bring about a new mode of action. This is indeed the reason why theologians admit "two distinct moralities", which are specifically different and lead to the divine and supernatural end in two different modes: either through the regulation acquired by our work and toil, an acquired or innate virtue, or the regulation and mensuration of the Holy Spirit.²

In a note at the bottom of the page, J. Vanier recalls the metaphor of the boat that would progress either with the help of men rowing or through wind in its sails, a metaphor that can be found in Jean de Saint-Thomas. He also calls in Cajetan, who "notes three different rules of

1. Jean Vanier, handwritten passage of the thesis, fragment "I. La morale chrétienne est une morale de charité", p. 5, ADM.

2. Ibid.

action”: the human mind enlightened by natural reason; the human mind enlightened by the light of grace and faith, but towards work and industry; the human mind as moved by the Holy Spirit. J. Vanier's reflection then carries on to the action of the Holy Spirit on the saintly man, on whom the Holy Spirit “intervenes at God's pleasures” and “according to the role meant for him in the Church”.

At its pleasure, and normally when neither positive law, nor obedience, nor human reason can describe the rule to follow, the Holy Spirit may directly inspire a Christian with words (by preaching) or outward actions.¹

Christian morality is a morality of God's pleasure, which implies that Christians be deeply faithful to God's choice and predilection.²

What we find here is the vocabulary T. Philippe cherishes. God's choices do not take shape “according to nature”: God chooses the humble, the “poor in spirit”, the little, all those that are “incapable of rising up to a properly rational life”. From then on, the “two moralities” beget two distinct ways. There is the “common way”, which very much resembles Jewish morality: it is the way of “the Christian people” and “laymen”, a life of piety and obedience to the Church; and there is the “strait way” of those who renounce the world, among whom are the “mystics” and the “saints”, whom “the Holy Spirit keeps for itself in quite a special way”. One can appreciate how the theory of the two moralities understood in this sense, that of the common way and the inspired way, can be rich in ambiguities in the milieu of the Philippe brothers. Saying that Christian ethics is an ethics of “God's pleasure” opens onto a morality leaning on “God's will”, which is arbitrary, delicate and subjective to discern indeed. We are here straying from the regulation by reason. For Maritain conversely, the saints' morality is in no case exempt from the morality of all men; he never dissociated the two moralities but located “the theological” not above but “at the core” of morality³.

Do the moral confusions of the group around the Philippe brothers

1. Jean Vanier, handwritten passage of the thesis, fragment “I. La morale chrétienne est une morale de charité”, p. 6, ADM.

2. Ibid. p7.

3. Cf. Jacques Maritain, *La philosophie morale. Examen historique et critique des grands systèmes*, Paris, Gallimard 1960, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 11, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. p. 10

resonate with Aristotelian ethics? There is of course no hedonism in Aristotle. But a biased reading of Aristotle – by stressing the finality without firmly holding tight on practicing virtues, by lessening the fault and the norm, exacerbating the self – does not forbid those confusions either. From a non-philosophical point of view, J. Vanier's thesis eventually appears as a pivotal moment to measure how, in the wake of the Vatican Council, the group, condemned in 1956, manages to re-institutionalize itself and obtain a form of ecclesial and social recognition through other elements.

CHAPTER 5.
The saint and the star

Florian Michel

The stark development of L'Arche from the 1960s on, J. Vanier's "starisation", the stunning effect produced by the February 2020 revelations supposes to analyze the "reputation for holiness" surrounding him. For years he passed for "a most saintly man"¹, the living embodiment of the Gospel, a man whose charismas were there for all to see, a "*starets*", the lay star of the Catholic renewal of John-Paul II's pontificate. Charismas of softness, peace, tenderness, charity, a deeply moving attention to handicapped people, an eloquence that reaches the hearts, a sense of discernment to accompany people on their journey to God and their interior liberation, service of the poorest, the weakest, the outcast...

Stricto sensu, the biographies that have been devoted to J. Vanier are hagiographies, void of shadows or embarrassing questions. We can thus read in them that between 1956 and 1964, a "pruned" J. Vanier, according to the evangelical formula, was, like Charles de Foucauld, living a hermit's life. It would have been a time of desert and simplification; he would have been emulating St John of the Cross or St François de Sales... When he settles in Trosly in 1964, he is compared to Abraham; like King Solomon, "his heart is listening". He is granted "a place in the sky". The words of his close circle are quoted: Jean is "inhabited by

1. Mother Teresa, quoted in the e-mail of Caroline Weldon to L'Arche internationale, January 20th 2021, Archives of the Commission.

God”, “guided by the Spirit”, “he is Jesus’s friend”¹. Delicate issues are always evaded or tackled at low cost. The facts that do not fit in with the saintly portrait of the hero are omitted.

Within the span of just a few months, J. Vanier just passed from a paradise almost guaranteed, including by the highest Church authorities, to almost unanimous reprobation. On May 7th 2019, the very day J. Vanier dies, Mgr Michel Aupetit, the then Archbishop of Paris, publishes a message in his honour:

J. Vanier has met the Lord Jesus, whom he never ceased to see through the mentally disabled. “What you have done unto one of the least of these my brothers, you have done unto me” (Mt 25, 40). I had the grace to go and visit him in his room at the Jeanne-Garnier Hospital some time ago. He was luminous and merry, all abandoned into God’s hands, like a child who is to return to the Father’s House. His life was devoted to bearing evidence of the beauty of anyone in this world, and especially of the most wounded².

On November 19th, 2019, in his speech for the World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis again recalls his memory:

We have mourned the death of a great apostle of the poor, J. Vanier, who, by his dedication, opened new pathways to sharing with disempowered people in order to promote them. J. Vanier received God’s gift to devote his whole life to those seriously handicapped brothers that society tends to exclude. He was a “nextdoor saint”³.

To understand J. Vanier’s rise to glory and the shock created by the revelations, it is necessary to dismantle the mechanism of how J. Vanier is represented as a “nextdoor saint”. One must also listen to those that claim they have received “graces”, who have not noticed any “disorder” and are still waiting for further explanations. It would also be necessary to manage to understand that kind of amnesia about the legal acts posed in the 1950s. Is this a defect of memory? A form of administrative negligence after years of scrupulous supervision, an act of mercy. A discredit of canonical law in

1. See for instance Anne-Sophie Constant, op. cit., 2014, p. 72, 73, 96, 15, 142-144.
2. <https://www.paris.catholique.fr/message-de-mgr-michel-aupetit-50501.html>
3. Message from Pope Francis, Speech of November 17th 2019, 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, 3rd World Day of the Poor. Speech accessible on www.vatican.va

general and of the Holy Office in particular? A relativization of the case face to the success of L’Arche and the supposed “holiness” of its founders? Or, more tritely, a faulty relay within an institution that is not organized to deal with a case stretching over 50 or 60 years?

T. Philippe’s and J. Vanier’s “reputation of holiness” will only be mentioned here in the perspective of its social representation. For the historian, a “reputation of holiness” is actually relevant above all to the history of representations and demands to combine a cultural and media history with the history of the “subject”, since the media, even if secular, today are the most likely to spread people’s reputation far and wide.

It is important, besides, to underline that it is the aura of L’Arche that publicizes J. Vanier’s figure – not the contrary – and gives it media recognition. One of the first awards received by J. Vanier in 1973 is thus given to the charity “for its worldwide actions in favour of handicapped people”¹. J. Vanier is the founding figure of L’Arche. But the reverse is also true in one sense: without the success of the foundation, J. Vanier would have remained a naval officer, a philosopher, the former director of L’Eau vive and, for the Holy Office, only the

“most fanatical disciple” of T. Philippe rather than the high-profile figure he has become².

“The Ark of saints and fools”

“*J. Vanier, Savior of People on the Margins, Dies at 90*”: such is the title of his obituary in *The New York Times* of May 7th, 2019, which draws the portrait of the “savior of the outcast” and recounts the fine story of L’Arche. From a man’s benevolence, from his generous intuition, the hardly believable adventure of an institution taking charge of the disabled and the outcast had emerged. It was the story of a multinational charity, spreading over all the continents, present in tens of countries, with more than a hundred communities and thousands of dedicated, enthusiastic volunteers. It was a Catholic success story in the

1. *Le Monde*, May 31st 1973

2. In other words, the connection between the founder and the foundation is not similar here to the Biblical image of the “tree” and the “fruit”. L’Arche is not only the “fruit” of Jean Vanier’s action; Jean Vanier is the “fruit” of L’Arche too.

long-running movement of secularization, an emblem of the new evangelization and of taking the margins into account. The stages of the growth are willingly pointed out: “38 countries, 154 communities”, *The New York Times* indicates. Privately testimonies are given of the success and the “graces” received. Quite early, in 1972, a Belgian Jesuit thus writes:

The only thing L'Arche has in common with Noah is to recall a deluge of kindness. It also appeared to me as the sign of an alliance, the one that God shapes in men's hearts for them to enact his love: the new and eternal alliance that has found the demonstration of a prime and ever bigger love in Trosly. J. Vanier, this extraordinary believer – in God and in man – founded L'Arche in 1964.¹

We might multiply the testimonies to recount this “fine story”. The press, both French and foreign, offers a good locus to observe and understand the process of mediatization and public recognition. The first article in *Le Monde* mentioning the figure of J. Vanier dates from April 12th, 1971². He is then described as “one of the chief organizers of pilgrimages to Lourdes for handicapped persons. The article underlines the generosity of the project and mentions it in the context of an exchange with India:

Mr J. Vanier, who is the son of the former Canadian ambassador to Paris, has pointed out that what is left over from the budget of the pilgrimage, made up of contributions of FF 35 per head, will serve to build an assistance centre in India to provide work to mentally handicapped people.

Right at the beginning of the 1970s, J. Vanier, whose filiation is reminded, appears in *Le Monde* fighting on two fronts: that of the handicapped and that of misery in what is then called the Third World. In its issue of May 23rd, 1973 – this is the second occurrence –, *Le Monde* reports the notable event that, a few days earlier, J. Vanier received prize of 250 000 francs (equivalent of 230 000 euros in 2019; source: INSEE), presented by Mr Maurice Druon, then Minister of Culture, in

1. André Roberti, letter dated March 20th 1972, ADM.

2. “Mgr Donze déplore que les pays développés se montrent les plus indifférents aux besoins des handicapés”, *Le Monde*, Monday, April 12th 1971.

the Gallery of Mirrors in Versailles. The international jury awarding the prize is presided over by René Cassin, a Nobel Peace Prize winner. It is composed of numerous foreign scientists, including some ten Nobel prize winners¹.

The third occurrence in *Le Monde* dates from May 29th, 1977 on the occasion of the gathering in Lyons of “some ten thousand charismatic Christians”. J. Vanier is then giving a talk beside Roger Schütz, the founder of the Taizé community:

The workshops will bear on evangelization, inward healing, discernment, prophecy, professional and union life and community experience. Talks will notably be given by J. Vanier from L'Arche and Roger Schütz from Taizé.²

The fourth occurrence dates from October 1977, in Rome. J. Vanier is now quoted as an example at the same time as Fr Roger of Taizé and Mother Teresa by the Cardinal-Archbishop of Calcutta. He then represents the future of the Church in a moment when traditional Church structures are sagging, secularization is growing and catechesis is being reduced in scope:

Cardinal Lawrence Trevor Picachy, Archbishop of Calcutta, is not surprised at the number of Christians who, in the East and the West, find their spiritual food in Asian religions, which are set on contemplation and inward peace. He moreover expresses the wish that, on his continent, where poverty is beyond imagination, the Church might change its style of living if it wants to have a real impact. He quoted J. Vanier at L'Arche, Fr Roger in Taizé, Mother Teresa in Calcutta, the Little Brothers and Sisters of Jesus, etc. who, up to a point, have managed to rouse up the world's conscience³.

In April 1980, fifth occurrence in the pages of *Le Monde*. J. Vanier is invited by the Secours catholique to give a talk together with the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal François Marty and Dom Helder Camara, the Brazilian archbishop who has come to La Goutte d'Or to denounce

1. “MM. Jean Bernard, Jean Piaget and Jean Vanier have received the Prix de l'Institut de la Vie”, *Le Monde*, Thursday, May 31st 1973.

2. “Une dizaine de milliers de charismatiques se rassembleront à Lyon”, *Le Monde*, Saturday, May 28th 1977.

3. “Nous sommes trop repliés sur les moyens traditionnels de la catéchèse”, *Fr Arrupe*”, *Le Monde*, October 22nd 1977.

the disastrous consequences of the action of Western multi-national firms in the *favellas* of his diocese:

Mr J. Vanier, founder of the communities of L'Arche, was among the guests, as well as Cardinal Marty, who paid homage to the volunteers' dedication".¹

Between 1971 and 1980, J. Vanier's high profile and ecclesial figure is thus defined, bit by bit, along very specific lines: Church revival, success, service to the poorest in a perspective both charismatic and ecumenical, as well as South-oriented dynamics represented by Dom Helder Camara's Brazil and Mother Teresa's India.

Budding and observable as early as the 1970s, J. Vanier's aura in the media soars up drastically in the next decades. In April 1985 he is the guest of Bernard Pivot's programme "Apostrophes" to "hear what the poor say". In 1991, he is dubbed "personality of the year", by the Canadian daily *La Presse*, which holds him as "the modern-day prophet" together with "Mother Teresa, Dom Helder Camara and Martin Luther King"². On October 27th, 2014, an article in *The Washington Post* referring to the "saint founder of L'Arche" is entitled "At L'Arche, those at the margins find love at the center". J. Vanier receives numerous medals, in Quebec, in Canada, in France and is awarded numerous prizes: for instance, among others, the Royal bank of Canada Award in 1991, the Paul VI Prize in 1997, The *Pacem in Terris* Award in 2013, the Templeton Prize in 2015³. On several occasions his name is put forward – always in vain – for the Nobel Peace Prize⁴.

The *media canonization* reaches its peak in an article by Henri Tincq in *Le Monde* of December 27th, 2000. The journalist then publishes a lengthy, full-page portrait of J. Vanier, entitled "L'Arche des saints et des fous" (the Ark of saints and fools). The portrait thus drawn would need to be taken line after line for it literally is, as Henri Tincq puts it, "a fairy tale":

1. "Le Secours catholique s'inquiète de 'la montée de la misère' à Paris", *Le Monde*, April 22nd 1980.

2. Jules Beliveau, "La personnalité de l'année 1991 : Jean Vanier. Un prophète des temps modernes", *La Presse*, 21 octobre 1991.

3. <https://www.templetonprize.org/laureate/jean-vanier/>

4. See the file "prix Nobel de la paix", ACJV.

Who is the madman? Who is the saint? There is a place in France, not far from the capital, where the fools are saints and the saints more or less all fools. It is to be found some ten kilometers from the edge of the forest of Compiègne, in one of those villages of stone and ivy that you would think is picked straight out of a catalog of second homes. Or out of a tale of magicians and fairies in which fiction always prevails over reality.

The last lines of the article quickly evacuate two snags in a few words: that of sexual abuses and that of sectarian deviance. Strictly speaking, the journalist gives up any effort of investigation to become J. Vanier's spokesman:

"At L'Arche, the housing is mixed, the evangelical gesture of the washing of the feet is virtually a ritual and the bath a high point of each day. Vanier insists on the importance of "feeling" and tenderness but to those that might worry about the risks of sexual abuse he answers by the rule of a communal life from which any form of "fusion and dependency" is banned. "Sect hunters" have definitely tried to rack into the already long saga of L'Arche to discredit the experiment, but simply wasted their time! This either irritates J. Vanier or makes him smile. He prefers to hark back to a much longer tradition, that of St Paul who, in the first century already, was writing to the Corinthians that: "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and the mighty!"¹

Taken by his subject, Henri Tincq here seems to take J. Vanier's answer at face value. An absence of "fusion and dependency" in the communities does not, on principle, preclude the possibility of sexual abuses. The journalist does not resist the temptation to discredit the "sect hunters" by taking responsibility for Vanier's comparison with St Paul.

Twenty years later, the same journalist is literally stunned at the news of the revelations:

Even if one is used to rolling out the foul-smelling carpet of sexual assaults within the Church as I have been doing these past twenty years, I was saying to myself on hearing the news this Saturday 22nd of February: not him! not that! J. Vanier, sanctified while still alive, buried less than a year ago among the fumes of incense, celebrated in France as much as in Canada. [...] As if the sky was falling down over my head, I learned this

1. Henri Tincq, "L'Arche des saints et des fous", *Le Monde*, Wednesday, December 27th 2000, p. 11.

Saturday that the saint that I had been venerating for a long time actually was a pervert, the author of sexual violence. [...] Today the icon has tumbled down, stunning people far and wide¹.

Reputations for holiness

It is important to understand the genesis of this fallen icon. To the historian, J. Vanier's reputation of holiness appears as a construction which, before it was spread and validated in the media, was first elaborated within a close circle of family and friends that became larger as the decades went by. In J. Vanier's milieu, holiness is craved for: the wish for it is expressed in the privacy of letters: any choice of life has to be "a call from God"; any success at an exam is the sign of "a special protection" of Providence; one's children, one's parents, one's spiritual father are held to be "saints". Building one's life around a project of holiness is nothing original in Catholicity, but the singularity here seems to stem from its so-to-speak public, "systemic" dimension, accepted even beyond the family circle. The Vanier family are persuaded to benefit from divine election. The point is not to suggest that J. Vanier voluntarily and artificially built up his reputation of holiness by himself, but to show that this is a cultural trait of his family milieu. It is therefore necessary to analyze his own and his family's discourse on holiness as lived or observed and to understand how this works in the family history.

In 1950, when J. Vanier resigns from the Canadian Navy, his father writes to a senior officer that "this is something between God and him, in which we must not interfere"². In 1952, Pauline Vanier writes to an English Carmelite nun:

Jock [who is by then in Montreal for his brother's ordination] goes back to l'Eau vive tomorrow and has done wonderful work here during the short time he has been in this country. He is a true apostle and is most certainly inspired. I think that Our Blessed Lord... is pleased with what he is doing³.

1. <http://www.slate.fr/story/187833jean-vanier-arche-agressions-sexuelles-eglise-catholique>
2. Letter quoted above (chapter 1). See also Anne-Sophie Constant, op. cit., 2014, p. 6
3. Letter quoted by Coady, op. cit., 2015.

With a view to taking out a loan to help his son, Georges Vanier explains to his banker at the *Crédit Foncier* in 1954 that "John is an apostle. [...] I intend to help him. To me it's almost a matter of conscience"¹. In January 1965, Pauline writes to a French nun:

Jean is in Canada and we see little of him. He is all given to the Lord and the Holy Virgin in that charity that has become his. He lectures at the University of Toronto, but he does not waste time: he works for them in between²

J. Vanier, like his mother, as we saw, was holding T. Philippe for a saintly priest. This is exactly what the Holy Office blame T. Philippe's circle of devotees for. The letter that Cardinal Pizzardo, Prefect of the Congregation of the Holy Office, sends to Mgr Maurice Roy, Archbishop of Quebec, in May 1956 actually was very clear on that point:

This young man [J. Vanier] showed a total lack of judgment in the appreciation of the moral responsibility of someone whose deviances he knew and whom he defended beyond the limits of true charity by making him pass for a saint around him³.

They, however, keep holding T. Philippe for a "slandered saint". At the end of the 1980s, J. Vanier says that "T. Philippe has an extraordinary inward unity and great sanctity. He is the one who has the eschatological dimension, the vision, and I am walking at his side"⁴. In 1994, he again testifies: "Fr Thomas was essentially the mystic priest. There was something quite godly in him. There was like an aura, a divine atmosphere suffused by his whole being"⁵. "I think that there was something drastically broken in him through those trials of 1952-1963. He suffered deep anxieties, stemming especially from the slanders"⁶. But developing this line of argument over decades, J. Vanier persists to exactly reproduce the causes for his condemnation in 1956.

T. Philippe's reputation for holiness keeps growing through the years. Testimonies multiply and raise many questions. Is this out of

1. Roger Quesnel, *Biographie de Georges Vanier*, Ottawa, 2006, volume 2, p. 76.
2. Pauline Vanier's letter to Petite-Mère Marguerite-Marie, January 14th 1965, ADM.
3. Cardinal Pizzardo's letter to Mgr Roy, May 29th 1956, AAQ and ACDF.
4. Spink, op. cit., p. 72.
5. Interview with J. Vanier, October 1994, p. 2. APJV.
6. *Ibid.* p. 6

blindness? Good faith? Ignorance? Collusion? Edward D. O'Connor, an American priest, member of the Holy Cross Congregation, who was also present at L'Eau Vive and authored a book entitled *Charismatic Renewal* (1971) illustrates this in his preface to the English translation of T. Philippe's *Contemplative Life*. The first American edition of this book dates from 1990:

My overriding concern has been to present faithfully the thought of a holy man whom I venerate as perhaps the finest interpreter of Christian spirituality in modern times. [...] The present work is one of the purest and most authentic statements I know of the classic doctrine on the contemplative life.¹

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996), a priest, has also given a striking testimony. He met T. Philippe at L'Arche in the 1980s; he was, Nouwen writes, a kind of *staretz*; he was a "saintly priest" who played "a crucial role" in his own spiritual journey; he was "a man of fire", of the "fire of the Holy Spirit", "transformed by the fire of God's love"; "he became for me the most tangible outward sign of God's compassion that I have ever experienced":

It seemed that the fire of God's spirit, the healing warmth of God's love, the softening touch of God's hands, where there for me. As I let my agony and anguish become visible to him, he became my father, my mother, my brother, my sister, my lover, my God.

One can hardly go beyond this as far as eulogies go. We must conclude from those testimonies that 1/ The origin of T. Philippe's reputation of sanctity harks back at least to L'Eau vive; we leave it to the Commission specially mandated by the Dominicans to investigate this point further; 2/ the condemnation of 1952-1956 had a reverse effect from the one expected; 3/ the reputation for sanctity maintained "beyond the limits of true charity"² by J. Vanier throughout his life exactly justifies the warning he received from the Holy Office.

1. Edward D. O'Connor, "Editor's Preface from the First Edition", T. Philippe, *The contemplative life*, translated from the French by Carmine Buonaiuto, edited by Edward d. O'Connor, New York, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990, second edition, 2009, p. XIV et XVI for the quotations.

2. Cardinal Pizzardo's letter to Mgr Roy, May 29th 1956, AAQ and ACDF.

As early as during the crisis at L'Eau vive, J. Vanier appears as T. Philippe's spiritual son after the latter has been removed. Heading an institution going through a rough period although he is not 25 yet, he is distinguished by T. Philippe as "the" disciple. Writing about him in a letter to Pauline Vanier probably written in the Summer of 1956, Mother Thérèse, the former prioress of the Nogent Carmel, removed by her Order in 1951 for her complicity with T. Philippe, says:

You will see later how he will be thanked for his present dedication... There is a divine plan about him and the way he already radiates bears the sign of the Good Lord's presence in him and about him.¹

Throughout his life, J. Vanier constantly rubs shoulders with saints, now canonized, who serve to publicly promote his own figure: John XXIII, Paul VI, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, John-Paul II, etc. The photographs of J. Vanier with recognized saints are numerous. In the archives, traces can also be found of this human and spiritual proximity. So, for instance, in this handwritten letter from Mother Teresa:

I was happy to meet you and Gabrielle [Einsle, one of the founders of L'Arche in India]. Our Lord must be very much in love with you, as you are with Him. May the joy of Our Lord be your strength. Pray for me and our people in India that we may know Jesus more intimately, love Him more personally, and serve Him more generously. God love you, M. Teresa². J. Vanier is literally carried onto the altars while still alive, on the evidence of the charity that he founded, L'Arche. He counsels, accompanies, paves the road to God in the hearts of numerous crowds, which, in return, express their recognition and faithfulness. Among many testimonies, we can quote that of a couple from Iowa, one of the children of whom is hosted in a home of L'Arche: J. Vanier's is to be highly rewarded in the skes³. Let us also quote that of Chris Péloquin, a Canadian woman from Vancouver who meets J. Vanier in 1974 and subsequently becomes a volunteer at L'Arche:

1. Letter from Mother Thérèse de Jésus ocd to Pauline Vanier, Summer 1956, APJV.

2. St Mother Teresa of Calcutta's letter to J. Vanier, April 23rd 1970, 121 J 62, AAI.

3. Letter to J. Vanier, 4 mai 1975, 121 J 61AAI. "We pray that your experiences in your travels to meet others like Jerry in other L'Arche homes will bring you many rewards – not only on this earth but also to be exceedingly more rewarding in Heaven."

Jean's sanctity was in everybody's mind. He had a charisma to announce the Gospel and he was doing it like nobody else. Fr Thomas was referred to in the same way.¹

Let us mention too that of Fabienne Dalbet who says that she received "graces of light and peace"² after one of J. Vanier's talks.

Private reservations, however, are sometimes recorded. "A person like you is on the way to holiness", Catherine Dehueck-Doherty, the founder of the "Madona House"³, whose cause of beatification was launched in 2000, writes to him in 1974. She adds, however, that she is worried at the "inward fragmentation" she has observed in J. Vanier:

How idiotic to worry about a person like you who leads thousands to God ! But here I am, worrying. Although I must admit it isn't an ordinary worry like people worry about money or jobs or so. [...] I worry about your fragmentation — another stupid word that doesn't apply to you at all, my very dear. How can one worry about the fragmentation of a saint, at least one who is on the way to sanctity like you. But here I am, praying for you constantly. Something intangible, something that I can't catch, something that bothers me and that I must write to you about.⁴

It is difficult to know exactly what Catherine Doherty is referring to here. Did she become aware of the inward flaws? Self-introspections? Mental disorders? The paradox is in the formulation: can a "saint" be "fragmented"?

J. Vanier's parents are not absent from the building up of the reputation for holiness. The funeral service of Georges Vanier, whose motto as Governor general of Canada was "*Fiat voluntas Dei*" is presided over by cardinal Léger in the Ottawa basilica:

God's presence manifested itself in his gestures and his words, with extreme discretion and disconcerting simplicity, of course. Is holiness anything else than living intimately and constantly with God?⁵

1. Interview 21.

2. Interview 23.

3. <https://www.madonahouse.org/about/>

4. Catherine Doherty's letter to J. Vanier, August 27th 1974 : <http://www.catherine-doherty.org/articles/2008/09/catherine-and-jean-vanier/>

5. Cardinal Léger's homily at the funeral service in the Ottawa basilica, March 8th 1967. Quoted by J. Vanier, op. cit., 1970, p. 18.

The social dimension of this reputation is signalled by the 10,000 messages of condolences sent to Rideau Hall¹. In 1970, J. Vanier writes a book of homage to his father to show the latter's spiritual depth and gather all the testimonies published in the press in the honour of "that witness of the absolute", that "man united to his God", that "peacemaker" to whom beatitude is promised². After Pauline Vanier's death in 1991, the idea to include her, together with her husband, in the project of beatification is launched. A Study Commission is then appointed by Mgr Marcel Gervais, Archbishop of Ottawa³. The investigation progresses, but seems to stumble for a while upon some feats of arms of George Vanier's during the First World War, especially since the Holy See has strong reservations as to the canonization of serving military personnel. The project, however, still follows its course until the beginning of the years 2000⁴.

A mask

T. Philippe's and J. Vanier's reputations for sanctity are not only the background of the events in the story that we are trying to understand. It plays a causal role in the genesis of the *success story* of L'Arche. As regards the abuses and the phenomena of psychological control, it creates an effect of surprise and guarantees a form of impunity in return:

I was surprised, one of the first victims to testify against T. Philippe writes in 1952, "but believing him most saintly, I packed up my surprise. [...] I found it all most weird, but I believed he was a saint."⁵

For the victims, the reputation for sanctity prevents them from seeing the facts clearly. For the abusers it serves as a screen to hide their actions. We have a testimony on the way this mechanism worked from J. Vanier himself. With a definite sense of denial and even lie, he thus writes in 2015:

1. Roger Quesnel, *Biographie de Madame Pauline Vanier*, volume 1, Ottawa, 1997, p. 2.

2. "Sainthood considered for late Georges Vanier", *Toronto Star*, November 9, 1985, p. L15.

3. Christopher Young, "Saintly Pauline Vanier lived a pilgrim's life", *Waterloo Region Record (ON)*, *City Opinion*, March 27 1991, p. A8.

4. *The Chronicle-Herald Religion*, Saturday, March 9, 2002 p. E11 : "Vanier closer to St. Georges. News improves chance late governor-general and wife may be named saints."

5. M. Guérault's testimony, June 1952, III O 59, APDF.

In the 1980s, the Bishop of Beauvais, Jacques Jullien (Bishop of Beauvais from 1978 to 1984), informed me of a denunciation by a woman of sexual relationships with Fr Thomas. The bishop asked me if I knew anything about it and I answered that I did not know the slightest thing. I must even say that this denunciation seemed to me totally incredible, for I did think that Fr Thomas was a man of God".¹

Seen from the outside, it is a desire of sanctity that attracts young French people and young foreigners to L'Arche. Donna Maronde, who arrives at L'Arche in the 1970s, provides an illustration for this. J. Vanier has been described to her by her cousin, Gerry McDonald (cf. chapter 7) as a "living saint"; Fr Philippe is a "stunning Dominican priest and saint"; his brother, Fr Marie-Dominique "is even better"². The same blinding mechanism is at work at L'Arche as at L'Eau vive. The reputation for holiness blinds some victims and dissuades them from speaking out. On this mechanism of their being reduced to silence, some victims give precise and coherent examples. It really is because of their abusers' reputation that the victims are unable to speak out:

Fr Thomas was such a "holy" man that it was impossible to make such accusations, and probably I was afraid and too weak for facing to defend my experience as truth³.

J. Vanier himself considers he is bound to silence. He had no right, he says, to reveal the core of the secret of the relationship between God and T. Philippe.

I always had the same impression of a man fashioned by the grace of Jesus. I can say that I never heard him criticize or judge anyone. He was always seeking to remain in Jesus and Mary. If I have never talked about the charges against Fr Thomas, it is because I felt I had no right in front of God

1. J. Vanier's letter to an unknown correspondent, August 2015, APJV. In the same sense, see also J. Vanier's public letter dated October 17th 2016, APJV: "I realise today [...] what sort of spiritual deviance was at work in Fr Thomas at that moment. [...] I totally ignored it at the time." See also J. Vanier's public letter of November 26th 2015, APJV: "I could not imagine a second that Fr Thomas might have committed those so grave and totally condemnable that have perturbed those women, until Mgr d'Ornelas disclosed them to me."

2. Donna Maronde Varnau, December 1st 2020, evidence received by the Commission.

3. Letter from Ulrike Dürrbeck to J. Vanier, June 16th 2015, APJV.

to disclose what did not belong to me. Fr Thomas had his secret and the secret of his relationship with God, and with Jesus and Mary.¹

Even after T. Philippe's death in 1993, testimonies of his "holiness" keep coming. Karin Donaldson, present at L'Arche in 1995, thus remarks that the streets of Trosly are full of "the smell of sanctity", the "fragrance of his holiness". She says that she had a vision of him and that all were holding him for a man "*of great personal holiness*"².

For J. Vanier, the "path to holiness" also seems to become like a path of seduction. The very first letter sent to "Brigitte" (an anonymous name) in September 1987 began this way:

My little [Brigitte], little sister in the heart of Jesus, your letter touched me. Yes, the Holy Spirit has, for a long time, incited me to pray with you, for you. I was feeling deeply in communion with you and this was confirmed to me at [...] last April, then again at Orval. It is as if Jesus wants us to live in communion with each other at the heart of the Trinity, in the heart of Jesus and of Marie, and to help each other on the way to holiness, to union with the Father, Jesus, on the way to the Gospel, which is also a way of the Cross.³

What can be concluded from those intertwined reputations for holiness and denunciations? There is obviously a deviation of the famous evangelical "do not judge" (Luke 6, 37, for instance) and a profound denial of the sense of canonical law. The L'Eau vive circle keeps proclaiming T. Philippe's holy reputation – a misunderstood saint, wrongly charged from the very moment he is condemned by Rome. For over 60 years, from 1952-1956 until 2016, this line of interpretation is spread and defended: Fr Thomas is a saintly priest who was slandered. In the public letter of May 2015 J. Vanier is still giving up judging "Fr Thomas" and saying how much, as for him, T. Philippe had been an "instrument of God", a "man of God who had led him to Jesus".

How can one understand such a refusal? In the archives, two interpretations are combined.

1. Jean Vanier, "Sur la préhistoire de l'Arche", 2003, APJV.

2. Letter from Karin Donaldson to Patrick Fontaine and Eileen Glass, undated, p. 2, p. 3, APJV.

3. First letter from J. Vanier to Brigitte, September 2nd 1987, APB. Those private letters will be presented in chapter 6.

The first lead is that of diseased and fragmented psyches. The second, more complex, remains inaccessible to the historian: it is that of “a devil’s intervention”. As an example of the first perspective, we can refer to an article by Henri Tincq who, in February 2020, just after the first results of the investigation by L’Arche Internationale had been released, was writing:

J. Vanier is not the first one to have stepped over the threshold and acted in the historical tradition of spiritual accompaniment, but such a split personality is hard to imagine in a man endowed with such faith and such compassion, who was talking so well about Jesus in front of his various publics during the day and, in the evening, went fondling psychologically vulnerable adult women.

The second interpretative lead, combined with the first, appears right from the beginning of the affair. Jacques Maritain was thus writing in a note to Charles Journet about T. Philippe in August 1951: “The devil and human psychology have turned the table”¹. In his private journal on June 19th, 1952, Maritain was again, on the spur of the moment, jointly evoking madness and diabolical intervention:

Fr Thomas is mad, to my mind. Fr Marie-Dominique knows the facts and declares that his brother being a saint, all is well anyhow. Another madman. The devil is romping around in this incredible affair².

On July 7th, 1952, Maritain similarly notes down in his private journal:

Charles Journet and Fr Paul Philippe [from the Holy Office] have definitely enlightened me on the case of Fr Thomas. For me it is an extraordinary case of schizophrenia, too rich a wine (sincere thirst of holiness, etc.) in a double-bottomed skin, the rot of which taints everything and turns it into perversion.³

The elements about the Philippe brothers mentioned here at random actually pose a series of complex questions, which parts 5 and 6 of the report especially will attempt to solve, not as concerns the “diabolical interventions”, the analysis of which is not within the reach of human sciences, but regarding the psychiatric and theological aspects.

1. Jacques Maritain’s to Charles Journet, August 29th 1951, Correspondance, vol. IV, p. 157

2. Maritain archives.

3. Maritain archives. Personal unpublished diary, currently being edited by the Cercle d’études Jacques

PART 2

The “Secrets of the mystic sect”.
Continuities and transfers
from L’Eau vive to L’Arche

Translation : *Gérard Hocmard*

Introduction

Florian Michel and Antoine Mourges

The thesis of a double continuity between L'Eau vive and L'Arche on the one hand, between T. Philippe and J. Vanier on the other, is not new. It appears under various formulations in the sources¹, in the biographies of J. Vanier² and Marie-Dominique Philippe³ as well as in the historical documents⁴, themselves mentioned in those testimonies now made public⁵.

The finalities and the publics of L'Eau vive and L'Arche are diametrically opposed. But in the background, the human network and some cultural elements pass from one milieu to the other. As early as June 1954, J. Vanier was explaining how in a letter to his parents:

Raymond came to Trosly with me. He will be able to tell you about the projects at L'Arche, for this is how the foundation is called... Noah's Ark taking on all the small animals to save them, floating on L'Eau vive (the Holy Office must not know)! This is also the Ark of the Covenant: Mary, *Mater Misericordiae* opening her arms to all the miseries of the world⁶.

1. "L'ordination sacerdotale de J. Vanier, *Votum* du Cardinal Paul Philippe", 9 mars 1977, ACDF. The fear of Rome in 1977 is that J. Vanier might be T. Philippe's continuator.

2. See chapter 3, "La source cachée" in Kathryn Spink's , *J. Vanier et l'aventure de L'Arche.*, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 39-67.

3. See Marie-Christine Lafon, *Marie-Dominique Philippe. Au cœur de l'Église du XX^e siècle*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2015, p. 314.

4. Antoine Mourges, Des "sages et des savants" aux "tout petits". Aux origines des communautés de l'Arche, 1945-1965, M.A. thesis, Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier III, 2009.

5. Michèle-France Pesneau, *L'emprise*, Golias, 2020, p. 107-118.

6. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, June 2nd 1964. APJV.

L'Arche "is floating" on L'Eau vive, in the sense that it "is resting" on it and "is sustained" by L'Eau vive, whose Marian devotions it shares, as can be seen in the formulation.

It is nevertheless necessary to carry the analogy emerging from the documents somewhat further. The image of L'Arche calls up the character of Noah, its builder, whose drunkenness and nudity chapter 9 of Genesis recalls. In the letter of June 1964 quoted above, J. Vanier thus suggests his parents to buy a large house in Trosly, rather than in Vézelay, so that "Dad [might become] a new Noah... beware the wine!". Previously, it was T. Philippe who was compared to old Noah, whose nudity his children had to hide. The passage from Genesis (9, 21-25) is not without an echo in the Philippe family:

Noah, so Genesis tells, got drunk and wound up naked in the middle of his tent. Cham, Canaan's father, saw that his father was naked and he told his two brothers, who were outside.

Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke and knew what his younger son had done unto him.

Cham, Noah's younger son, as well as his own son Canaan, are cursed for *seeing* and *telling*. On the contrary, the elder sons, Shem and Japheth, are blessed for keeping mum and silently covering their drunken father, whose nudity and frailty they did not so much as dare to face.

The image of the Ark is meaningful: the place where "all the animals" find refuge and are saved in communion, it is the sign of the covenant and God's mercy. Noah's figure is no less meaningful, being so present in T. Philippe's defense, for instance. Noah's Ark is the work whose mission of salvation *justifies* its builder even in his being drunk. The building of the Ark saves Noah, whose sons are bound to keep silent. We shall give a few examples only. The first dates from 1952:

I am asking her [Virgin Mary], M.-D. Philippe writes to the Holy Office Commissioner, to make you understand what I think She has made me understand right from the beginning of this story: I thought of Noah's sons. As the latter was drunk, one looked at his father's nudity with curiosity

while the other looked away. I then understood that I had to only look at Her, shut up and defend my brother's doctrine¹.

The parallel is quite imperfect: Noah's sons cover their father's nudity and his drunkenness, M.-D. Philippe defends his brother's doctrine. Even if Dominicans are not Benedictines, let us remark *en passant* that this attitude of defending one's foster-brother is totally contrary to monastic customs: this is a serious breach of St Benedict's rule, very precise on this point². The same image of Noah's sons nevertheless crops up again in 1957:

M.-D. Philippe claimed that, like Noah's sons, he had to cover his brother's faults, that he was suspending his judgment. Such excuses are not admissible³.

It is taken up once again thirty years later, in the early 90s, by M.-D. Philippe when a former resident of L'Arche complains to him about the fact that his wife had been sexually abused by T. Philippe:

Fr Marie-Do said to me a bit angrily: "You're not inside Fr Thomas's conscience". Then he talked about Shem and Japheth covering Noah's nudity, stepping backwards not to see it."⁴

One can notice here that the use of Biblical images and figures is very singular in what the Vanier - Philippe milieu are writing and sometimes seems to stem from a sort of gnostic deviation or at least from a very weak exegesis to cover the naked crudity of the abuses.⁵

It is legitimate in their case to use the word "sect" not to describe the whole of L'Eau vive or the whole of L'Arche, but to apply it to the nucleus of men and women who secretly preserve a continuity and share specific traits (a special theology, a deviation within Catholicism,

1. M.-D. Philippe's letter to Paul Philippe (from the Holy Office), September 15th 1952.

2. See for instance rule n° 69 of St Benedict's rule: "No one in the monastery shall permit himself to defend another", [...] "however close their kinship may be": "there may result very great occasions for scandal. If someone breaks this prohibition, let him be punished severely."

3. Fr Duchêne's *Appunto*, April 1957, ACDF.

4. Interview n° 104.

5. On this point, see the "gnose" article in *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, Jean-Yves Lacoste, dir. Paris, PUF, 2020.

wayward practices, privileged and private revelations supposedly revealing a new divine mystery, sexual practices). Historically speaking, the use of the word “sect” is attested in the victims’ testimonies and taken back again in the analyses of the Holy Office.

A woman who was a victim, thus writes to Paul Philippe, of the Holy Office, in February 1956:

These are not new facts that I want to signal, but what I rather want to say is that the foundation seems to me to have been the very structure of a sect.

The description she gives in her testimony goes even further: she mentions “a kind of free-masonry of the Virgin’s grandchildren” and underlines the “initiation” required “to enter the foundation”, the “secret uniting its practitioners vs. those not initiated”, the “laws proper to the foundation”, the “sole fear of betraying the foundation” and consequently the “ease with which it is envisaged to lie to the Church”.¹ “Sect” and “free-masonry”, with, *mutatis mutandis*, possible analogies at the time of T. Philippe’s condemnation with the “godfather” who, from within his cell, continues to run “business”.

Based on the analyses of three bishops and theologians, Paul Philippe in his turn takes up the word “sect”, calling it “mystic” – “*setta mistica*”. He defends the relevance of the phrase in a report he sends to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in February 1977:

The phrase “mystic sect”, which seems a bit too strong at first sight, has often been used, not only by the plaintiffs but also by Mgr Journet, Mgr Brot, auxiliary bishop of Paris, and Mgr Huyghe, bishop of Arras; it expresses the sad reality of the years 1945-1952.²

In his 1977 report, Paul Philippe gives details:

At L’Eau vive, the secrets of the “mystic sect” were imposed under oath on the women “initiated”, even towards their confessors. In case J. Vanier had been instituted Fr Thomas Philippe’s “continuator”, he would similarly have promised today to never speak at any cost.³

1. Myriam Tannhof’s letter to Paul Philippe, February 22nd 1956, ACDF.

2. “L’ordination sacerdotale de J. Vanier, Votum du Cardinal Paul Philippe”, March 9th, 1977, ACDF.

3. “L’ordination sacerdotale de J. Vanier, Votum du Cardinal Paul Philippe”, March 9th, 1977, ACDF.

Must the uses of the term “sect” in the context of L’Eau vive be understood in the same sense as the one given by the sociologists of religious facts? We hit here upon some fundamental questions of the sociology of religions. Max Weber, followed by Ernst Troeltsch, had thus elaborated an ideal-typical opposition of “Church” vs. “Sect”, in which the second term, aimed at describing virtuoso groups meeting on a voluntary basis – like-minded or chosen – and, resting on charismatic dynamics, constitute themselves into societies presenting an alternative to “the world” around. In this sense, the term “sect” is not derogatory. “Church”, as for it, implied a universal scope, open to all and organized on a classical organisational pattern: Weber refers to clerics as “civil servants” in the bureaucratic and rational sense of the word. J. Vanier’s “charisma” and the “not-for-all” dimension of T. Philippe’s doctrine, for instance, place them both clearly in the direction of a “sect”. Sociologist Jean-Paul Willaime was reminding of the famous distinction between Church and Sect as two different modes of socially living one’s religion as follows:

The first, the *Church*, constitutes a bureaucratized institution of salvation open to all in which the functional authority of the priest exercises itself; it is in close symbiosis with the surrounding society. The second, the *Sect*, forms a voluntary society of believers breaking more or less clearly with the social environment; inside such a society, the prevailing religious authority is of a charismatic type. Whereas one is a born member of a *Church*, one becomes a member of a *Sect* through a voluntary approach.¹

Those “types” are to be understood as stylized representations of realities and situations that are much more balanced and intertwined, with variable intensities. They are only tools for comprehension and require empirical examination and deeper analysis. The more contemporary uses of the word “sect” actually put this classical grid of interpretation to the test. Some of the chief characteristics of sectarian movements – typified by psychological hold, the cult of the leader, the adherents’ breaking up with their families and their circles of ordinary

1. Jean-Paul Willaime, *Sociologie des religions*, Presses Universitaires de France, “Que sais-je?”, 2021, p. 7-39. For her help in the sociological treatment of the notion of “sect”, let Marie Balas be thanked here.

sociability, the revisiting in a messianic and apocalyptic sense of the history of the community and its salvation proposal, endogamous marriages, specific sexual practices, possibly economic exchanges in “closed circuit”, etc. – can be found in the deviations of the functioning modes of some religious communities, leading to abuses in various cases. This however does not necessarily lead to deviances and cannot be reduced to it either.¹

The most complex point, actually, is this entanglement of the tension between the two types: L’Arche, at the time it was founded, must be thought of as relevant of the “sect” type in the sociological sense, but means to place itself at the heart of the Church, thus benefitting from the latter’s legitimation, recognition and inputs: a sect, with its “clergy (clerics or, like J. Vanier, lay people), its own rites, such as praying on someone’s heart for instance, and its specific dogmas, private prophecies, “Marian maximalism”², etc. – a sect, then, hidden within a foundation that is itself at the heart of the Church.

The other delicate issue is that it is not a frozen phenomenon, but entails a bunch of tensions, oustings, moments of awareness, which in turn imply exits, recruitments, new positionings within the system, etc. The years 1952-1964 are a time of metamorphosis. The sect at the background of L’Eau vive is no longer quite the same as the one that founds L’Arche. The nucleus definitely remains the same, but the movements taking place in between actually are both a reinforcement and a mutation of that nucleus, with the intensification of a culture of camouflage, a solidification of T. Philippe’s argumentation, the increasing role of J. Vanier as First Mate, a modification of T. Philippe’s image and role in

1. Nathalie Luca, *Les sectes*. Presses Universitaires de France, “Que sais-je?”, 2016, notably see chapter 1. The bibliography is abundant: Danièle Hervieu-Léger, ““Religion”, “secte”, “superstition”: des mots piégés?”, *Histoire, monde et cultures religieuses*, 2013/2 (n° 26), p. 121-127. Pierre Lassave, “Les mots des dictionnaires”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 156 | 2011, 13-30. À propos de : *Dictionnaire des faits religieux*, Régine Azria, Danièle Hervieu-Léger (éd.), Paris, Presses universitaires de France, coll. “Quadrige/Dicos-Poche”, 2010, 1340 p., *Dictionnaire des religions*, Paul Poupard (éd.), Paris, Presses universitaires de France, coll. “Quadrige/Dicos-Poche”, 2007, 2218 p. (1^{re} éd. 1984).

2. Cf. Maritain’s letter to Journet: “And this mannerism of wanting to make the Holy Virgin her Son’s bride[...] infuriates and shocks me”, in Jacques Maritain-Charles Journet, *Correspondance*, IV, July 24th, 1951, p. 140.

the sect (as hidden leader), the increasing valorization of the notion of spiritual and intellectual poverty.

This second part of the report consists of four chapters. The first will present the material of J. Vanier’s “private correspondence”, i.e. the letters sent and received, to get to the heart of the matter (chapter 6). The next chapter will describe “the men and women involved in the sectarian dynamics” and will bear more specifically on the links between men and women between L’Eau vive and L’Arche (chapter 7). The last two chapters will lay the stress on two networks, two religious families close to J. Vanier, from L’Eau vive till L’Arche: the Carmel (chapter 8) and Marie-Dominique Philippe (chapter 9).

CHAPTER 6.
The Private Correspondence

Florian Michel

The stakes in this chapter are triple stakes: to characterize the corpus of J. Vanier's private correspondence as a whole, to propose a framework to analyze it, and lastly to analyze two distinct case studies: first J. Vanier's correspondence with Mother Marguerite-Marie, of the "Sœurs de la Sainte-Vierge" community, and then his correspondence with a married woman, close to L'Arche, who chose "Brigitte" as pseudo. More than three decades separate those two corpuses of letters; this will permit to observe the constants and variations in J. Vanier's mode of private writing.

The various collections of archives consulted consist of about 1 400 letters altogether, written by J. Vanier (his "active" correspondence") and/or received by him (his "passive" correspondence) and constituting what can be called his "private correspondence". Because of the vicissitudes linked to the conservation of documents, with a few exceptions – notably J. Vanier's correspondence with Catherine Doherty¹, with

1. Little of this correspondence has been digitalised: it amounts to 2 letters from J. Vanier to Catherine Doherty and 2 from Catherine Doherty to J. Vanier, 1970-1974, Madonna House Archives, Combermere (Canada).

Fr Lallement¹, scraps of correspondence with “Léa” (a username)² – we actually do not have large “complete” correspondences of J. Vanier, that is to say correspondences including both the letters sent by him to a correspondent and the latter’s answers. The documentary corpus offers a dissymmetry which the analysis must take into account.

Owing to their writer and/or recipient as well as to their object, “private” letters are to be distinguished from functional or administrative ones. The letters sent by J. Vanier to members of his family or to other persons, the subject of which is of private order, such as family questions, spiritual or emotional life, health, new from the inner circle of friends, etc., are considered as belonging to his “private” correspondence. J. Vanier’s passive correspondence as preserved proves, as we shall see, very singular, properly speaking very emotional and very “intimate”, since this is the epithet T. Philippe uses in 1952 to qualify the correspondence among themselves as “quite private and hidden”.³ The limit between *private correspondence* and *functional correspondence* is not always easy to draw because of J. Vanier’s style of writing. His active correspondence with his Ph D supervisor (Lallement) or the Commissioner of the Holy office (Dominican Paul Philippe), which one might have imagined philosophical or judicial, often reflects his “self”. Similarly, a letter describing the beginnings of a new community in Africa or India, for instance, may well end up with very personal and friendly considerations.

In their vast majority, J. Vanier’s letters come from three different archive funds:

- Jean Vanier’s personal archives (APJV): letters sent to his parents and retrieved by him, passive correspondence found in his notebooks,

1. 18 of J. Vanier’s letters to Canon Lallement and 5 of the latter’s to J. Vanier are to be found in the Fonds Lallement, Archives de l’Institut catholique de Paris. One must add 3 letters from J. Vanier to Canon Lallement in the archives of the diocese of Meaux (ADM).

2. In various files of the APJV, approximately 4 letters from J. Vanier to Léa (without any personal content, 1974-1976) and 12 letters from Léa to J. Vanier (1970s – 1980s). Those letters are both administrative, mostly concerning the foundation of a community of L’Arche in a Southern country but several of them are of more private nature. On top of those, 3 letters from Léa to J. Vanier are kept inside the latter’s notebooks.

3. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, May 1952, APJV : “My very dear Jean. I think that Mary desires you me to send you these few lines by means of Her diplomatic bag. I’ll be writing an official letter [some day] ; this one is quite private and hidden.»

passive correspondence noted “Not for all”, letters retrieved from various files.

- Diocesan, institutional, Roman archives, etc.: active correspondence, letters sent by J. Vanier to various correspondents.
- Active correspondence of letters sent by J. Vanier to various women, who have forwarded the originals, copies or transcriptions of those letters to the study commission.

As concerns the methodology of the analysis of this epistolary material¹, it is important to underline several general aspects. Letters are like a complement – a “paratext” – around J. Vanier’s person and public action. The legitimate uses of letters as historical material have been firmly defined. Analyzing private correspondence is a classical approach for a historian:

Correspondence constitutes a polymorphic documentary massif, open to multiple uses, biographical, literary, anthropological or historical².

Points of methodological prudence are also mapped. Correspondences always “resist” the historian: they are fragmentary, allusive, sometimes opaque, coded, pointillistic. Their limits as historical documents have thus been pointed out:

One may indeed grab factual information on the events, the conditions of life (habitat, education, health) or on the nature of relationships (friendship, solidarity, intellectual exchanges...); one may give flesh to a biography, document a chronology; one may also study the writing practices for themselves, the narrative resources, the social functions of the letter. But whatever the objective, documentary, biographical or anthropological, the historian is each time confronted to the notions of reality and intimacy, which prove all the more resistant since they a priori seem more naturally associated with correspondence as a genre³.

1. See especially articles “correspondance”, “paratexte”, “auto textualité” on <http://www.item.ens.fr/dictionnaire/correspondance/>

Also see Françoise Simonet-Tenant, “Aperçu historique de l’écriture épistolaire : du social à l’intime”, *Le français aujourd’hui*, 2004/4 (n° 147), p. 35-42. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-francais-aujourd-hui-2004-4-page-35.htm>; also Cécile Dauphin, “Les correspondances comme objet historique. Un travail sur les limites”, *Sociétés & Représentations*, 2002/1 (n° 13), p. 43-50. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/revue-societes-et-representations-2002-1-page-43.htm>

2. Cécile Dauphin, art. cit., 2002, p. 43.

3. Cécile Dauphin, art. cit., 2002, p. 46-47.

In other words, correspondence as material is paradoxical: letters are “held as the safest means of entering backstage, almost like a burglar, into someone’s intimacy and yet, the historian is never “able to reach the inner self of the letter-writers or to bring to life again any essence of their intimacy”.

Letters do not reveal the inner self, they only make one feel its presence¹.

It is important to bear these methodological warnings in mind when reading and analyzing J. Vanier’s correspondence. There is of course factual information in his active and passive correspondence but it is obviously the vocabulary, the style, the culture that shed another light on the inter-personal relationships and give sense to what is being lived. The inner self is made present, perceptible, it is not delineated. This neither “voyeurism” nor “burglary”, but an attempt to understand what is written, what *gives access* to the inner self.

The interpretative difficulty of correspondences is a hermeneutic that might be said to be a hermeneutic of suggestion. For want of being able to read the correspondents’ answers or always knowing each of the elements of the relational and psychological context of who is writing, the writer might be tempted to *over-interpret* private letters, projecting in them what remains uncertain, non-ascertained, even perhaps non-shared by the recipient. One must by no means impose a sexual interpretation of any tenderness that might be expressed in the correspondence, but one must not fall into the reverse excess either, which would consist in a sort of pious naivety and would only see evangelical softness in some ambiguous formulations, since it is exactly this shift in meaning from the spiritual to the carnal that helps us find our way towards the sense of it all. Trying to understand, which is the aim of our work, therefore naturally demands discernment. To take an example, a woman ends up her letter to J. Vanier with what follows:

“Deeply united to you
in the Heart of Jesus
Peaceful
Resting there with you
Deep in Him...

1. Cécile Dauphin, art. cit., p. 48.

Much love. Much peace to you
dear brother
dearly beloved”.¹

The form of the letter here imitates the poems that J. Vanier could publish in the 1970s and also takes up again some epistolary codes. What may be deduced from the vocabulary employed here? Tenderness, love, affection, appeasement, fraternity, a very unitive language (by definition), depth, spirituality, but also a confusion observable between the theological and the fusional languages, since the Heart of Jesus becomes the seat of the deep fusion and rest in common. At the interpretative level one will, however, refrain from going *beyond* this, especially since the author of the letter did not answer the Commission’s requests for an interview.

Whoever reads private correspondences constantly meets two obstacles that can rarely be overcome: that of naivety which would consist in seeing only a spiritual-evangelical effusion in each expression of unitive tenderness and that of over-interpretation, which would consist in only projecting sex onto the same expressions.

Passive correspondences: the female voices

Very little from J. Vanier’s correspondence has been preserved in the “Archives personnelles de Jean Vanier” (APJV) fund. The Commission could only analyze some 450 of the letters he received from the 1950s to the years 2000. Three main subsets can be made out within the APJV:

- the letters kept in a file set apart, entitled “Not For All” (340 letters);
- the letters retrieved from J. Vanier’s notebooks (50 letters);
- the letters retrieved in scattered files: letters exchanged with Léa in a file of documents concerning foundations of L’Arche in foreign countries (10 letters from Léa, 4 from J. Vanier); a letter from Karin Donaldson (undated, 17 p.); a letter from a Dominican nun from Prouilhe (Summer 1974); personal letters and reports from Xavier Le Pichon (2016-2017); a letter from Jean Laeckmann (1973); a

1. Léa’s letter to J. Vanier, January 18th 1975, answering a circular letter from him, dated January 12th, 1975 (APJV).

letter from Judy Farquharson, who mentions “decades of confusion” (“You used my body for your own misguided gratification”, August 18th 2016); letters from Ulrike Dürrbeck, etc.

THE “NFA” LETTERS: MARY’S DIPLOMATIC BAG

The file entitled “NFA” contains a jumble of documents, notes and old letters received by J. Vanier in the years 1950-1960. He had expressed the verbal wish that those documents be destroyed after his death. He had assigned this task to a person who, in fine, had to hand over those documents to the officials of L’Arche internationale and L’Arche en France. Concerning this “NFA” file, elements there require some precisions: the title of the file, J. Vanier’s wish to have those documents destroyed after his demise, the modes of conservation and transmission.

“NFA” means “Not For All”. This is something well-known of Jean Vanier’s close circle, a convention and a euphemism to indicate a restricted diffusion. The “NFA” acronym has a history: in the 1950s, it was apposed by J. Vanier on the theological texts that T. Philippe was writing and that he had his faithful followers transcribe. It appears in the inventory of T. Philippe’s papers found when he died.¹ The formula, emblematic of the culture of secrecy surrounding the group of the “tout-petits” (little ones), appears in the years 1950. In this sense, “NFA” covers not only the documents themselves, but the *doctrine*, reserved to some “happy few”. In this sense, “NFA” designed a corpus of documents dating from the 1950s, which included a theological part to which we had an indirect access and a part of correspondence, which completes it in many respects and permits to understand the modalities of production of those writings.

Second remark: J. Vanier desired to keep this file *in its entirety* till his last breath, whereas there were many archives he voluntarily destroyed while still alive. In other words, he did not seem able to either get rid of the “NFA” documents or envisage destroying them himself. Only in death was he rid of them. It was only after his death that they in turn were to disappear, in a kind of *post-mortem* sacrifice of the last

1. Cf. the last point of the “inventory of [T. Philippe’s] papers at Jacqueline d’Halluin’s”, 1992, APJV : “Papiers confidentiels : textes écrits avant 1965 et tapés à la machine par J. Vanier et Jacqueline d’Halluin et classés par J. Vanier ‘NFA’ ce qui veut dire Not For All (Pas pour tous).”

“relics” of the collective history of the “tout-petits” (little ones), of whom J. Vanier was the last to pass away. As a consequence, the anthropological status, so to speak, of those documents is quite odd. They are in no way a sort of will, since the specific aim of a will is to be made public so as to clarify the succession. Nothing to do either with “voices from beyond the grave” since the “NFA” documents were intended to be destroyed even if they, in many respects, are “letters from beyond the grave”. One may think that, for J. Vanier, they are something like the core of the system, the foundation of the options of his existence, his private grammar, his catechism, the cornerstone of his life’s history, the visible sign of a past reality, relics, in the religious sense unintelligible for the common man, of a few witnesses of God whom nobody could understand any longer after him. If it is to make any sense, this is what the complex desire of both conserving and destroying the “NFA” file is susceptible to suggest, which shows how strange it all is.

Third remark: the result is that it was only through a coincidence that the Commission heard about the “NFA” file. Apart from its being kept over six decades by J. Vanier himself, this comes from the fact that a person verbally entrusted by him to destroy the file did not respect the assignment and the Commission owes the transmission of the originals of those letters to the vigilance of L’Arche international. The job of the Study Commission was then very ordinarily to classify the letters and documents by correspondents and to make an inventory of the whole body of documents so as to exploit their meaning in the best possible way.

The “NFA” file can be divided into three subsets, of unequal significance. One is entitled by the Commission: “Manuscripts and notes from J. Vanier. Eau vive (1952-1954)”. The point for him is then to take in hand T. Philippe’s succession at the head of L’Eau vive. This set completes the abundant documentation on the latter. An A5-format envelope contains rough copies of accounts, pious images in memory of specific religious events (communions, taking the cloth, etc.), visit cards, Christmas cards, L’Arche cards, a calligraphy of the prayer of L’Arche, New Year and birthday cards, thin hairlocks in an envelope – without any significant indication of their origin – numerous colour or black and white photos of various persons, especially of Anne de Rosambo, Jacqueline d’Halluin and Gerry Mc Donald, rose petals from

Lisieux, train tickets, etc. The third subset includes a count of 340 letters according to the Commission, which classified them. There are 19 correspondents altogether, 4 of whom remain unidentified.

Correspondences kept in the “NFA” file

Author	Recipient	Period	Nb
HALLUIN Jacqueline (d’)	J. Vanier	1952-1962	89
HALLUIN Jacqueline (d’)	Anne de Rosanbo	1959; s. d.	3
HUEBER Marise	J. Vanier	1958-1961	4
Husketon Kathy	J. Vanier	1964	1
Mc Donald Gerry	J. Vanier	Sans date	4
PHILIPPE Marie-Dominique	J. Vanier	1958-1959	2
Mère Myriam Ducimetière-Monod ¹	J. Vanier	1965-1969	6
Philippe Thomas	J. Vanier	1952-1964	178
Philippe Thomas	Anne de Rosanbo	s. d.	2
POSEZ Paulette	J. Vanier	s. d.	2
ROSANBO Anne (de)	J. Vanier	1952-1969	35
ROSANBO Anne (de)	Jacqueline d’Halluin	4 April 1959	1
Mgr ROY Maurice	J. Vanier	25 May 1956	1
“Sœur Thérèse de Jésus” (ocd) ²	J. Vanier	1952-1960	4
Thompson John	J. Vanier	22 June 1957	1
Vanier Georges	M. Duhamel	1959	1
WAMBERGUE Marie-Madeleine ³	J. Vanier	Fin des années 1960	2
“Barbara” [sans nom de famille]	J. Vanier	s. d.	1
“Anonyme 1” ⁴	J. Vanier	s. d.	1

1. Prioress of the Cognac Carmel.

2. Carmelite nun from the Buissonnets Carmel. Former prioress of the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel.

3. Former Nogent Carmelite nun, removed to Abbeville en 1956, with 3 photos and manuscript notes at their backs

4. The letter includes this formula : “Garde-moi bien fort! Je t’aime.” (Hold me firmly! I love you)

“Anonyme 2” ¹	J. Vanier	s. d.	1
“Anonyme 3” ²	J. Vanier	s. d.	1
Total			340

Among those letters,

- 180 are from T. Philippe (53%), 178 to J. Vanier, 2 to Anne de Rosanbo;
- 92 from Jacqueline d’Halluin (27%), 89 to J. Vanier, 3 to Anne de Rosanbo;
- 36 from Anne de Rosanbo (11%), 35 to J. Vanier, 1 to Jacqueline d’Halluin;
- 98% of the letters are sent to J. Vanier;
- 2% are sent to Anne de Rosanbo, Jacqueline d’Halluin or T. Philippe;
- Out of the 18 correspondents, 5 (28%) are men (T. Philippe, Marie-Dominique Philippe, Mgr Roy, Archbishop of Quebec, Dr Thompson, Georges Vanier). 13 (72%) are women;
- 91% of the letters are exchanged between J. Vanier, T. Philippe, Jacqueline d’Halluin and Anne de Rosanbo.
- 9% of the letters are exchanged between J. Vanier and the other 15 correspondents.

Those figures reveal the composition of the group of the “tout-petits” (little ones): The nucleus consists of J. Vanier, T. Philippe, Jacqueline d’Halluin and Anne de Rosanbo. The correspondence between those four rests on a code, the key of which was fortunately found in the “NFA” file: if one reads “N. a vu Pi.” in the letters, it means that T. Philippe has seen Anne de Rosanbo. If one reads “Jer. a écrit à Did.”, it means that J. Vanier has written to Marie-Dominique Philippe, etc.

1. The letter includes this formula: “Oh! partons, j’ai envie de fuir les tristes fêtes de la terre pour celles du ciel.” (Ah! Let’s get away, I feel like leaving the sad earthly festivities for those of heaven).

2. A lady, 50-odd-years old, the mother of children, who is a primary school teacher in an institution called “Sainte Marie Médiatrice”, connected to l’Eau vive.

Principal elements of the code in the “NFA” dossiers:

Code	Meaning	Person	Comments
N	Étienne (Stephen)	T. Philippe	Allusion to the first martyr. The analogy drawn between T. Philippe and St Stephen means that T. Philippe’s trial is seen by the group as similar to Stephen’s condemnation and lapidation, the Holy Office being assimilated to the Sanhedrin that condemns and the crowd that lapidates, etc.
Jer	Jérémie (Jeremiah)	Jean Vanier	Jérémie embodies the prophetic role. Cf. St Paul comparing himself to Jeremiah. (Ga, 1, 1; 1, 6; 2, 15). The pseudo is perhaps also an allusion to the verse: “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters and hewed them out, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jr 2, 13). The living water is the name of T. Philippe’s foundation (L’Eau vive). J. Vanier is the new Jeremy, who denounces the forsaking of the living water and the leaks in the “cistern” of the modern world.
Pi, ou Mam Pi	Pierre	Anne de Rosanbo	Passage from feminine to masculine so as not to arouse the attention of authorities susceptible to intercept and read the letters. Pierre, the first of the Apostles, is a pillar of the Church.
Pa	Paul	Jacqueline d’Halluin	Idem. Paul, the missionary <i>par excellence</i> , another pillar of the Church.
Did / Didier		Marie-Dominique Philippe	The Commission has not found out the reasons for this code name in the letters.

The implementation of this code system begins in the second half of the year 1952. We for instance notice that the name “Pierre” meaning Ann de Rosanbo first crops up in a letter of early July 1952, as T. Philippe briefly stays in Cîteaux (between June 23rd and July 7th). In the same letter he indicates that the control of his correspondence by Fr Avril is becoming stricter and that not all of what was sent to him in Cîteaux has

reached him. He is writing to J. Vanier to ask “Pierre” to warn a certain number of people not to send anything to him any more (especially his sister Cécile in Bouvines). It is the increased surveillance of his correspondence that brings about the progressive implementation of those code names. Still, the real names and code names appear simultaneously in T. Philippe’s letters to J. Vanier until the beginning of the year 1953. The use of the ones or the others perhaps depends on the degree of safety surrounding the transmission of the mail and/or the degree of confidentiality of the information imparted. From 1953 on, the use of code names becomes more systematic.

Beside this, the correspondence exchanged between J. Vanier, T. Philippe, Anne de Rosanbo and Jacqueline d’Halluin develops a whole system of analogies. The one between T. Philippe and Christ, for instance, is very explicit in many letters¹. Commenting on the weather, Jacqueline d’Halluin thus writes to J. Vanier: “+6° in Rome. How cozy my Little Jesus must be”². In yet another letter, the analogy is prolonged: “N so often says ‘if a single soul yields to Love, Love is comforted’. Eventually I found many similitudes between myself and Sinful Magdalen”³.

Among the codes, one also notes “M” for Mary, “TSV” for Très Sainte Vierge (Most Holy Virgin), “BD” for Bon Dieu (Good Lord). Placenames also are abridged: “R” is for Rome, “P” for Paris, “RD” for rue Duranton in Paris, where Jacqueline d’Halluin has a flat. “F” or “Fat” is for Fatima, where J. Vanier is building a house where the “tout-petits” (little ones) regularly go and stay, “LM” for Locmaria, a house of Anne de Rosanbo’s in Villebon-sur-Yvette. Some elements of language are coded as well: “m” is for “minou” (pussy) and “pm” for “petit minou”, the pet name that Anne de Rosanbo and J. d’Halluin give each other and also give to J. Vanier; “j.f.” or “p.f.” for “jeune frère” (young brother) also design J. Vanier; “p.n.” is for the “petites notes” often handwritten by “N” or “Did” and later typed by “Pa” or “Pi”. “O” is for “orison”, “é” for “épouse” (spouse), “p.b.” for “petits baisers” (little kisses), with an

1.³⁴ Undated letter from “Pa” to “Pi”: “Pa” is at an adoration: “Jesus exposed in the little hole of the grid makes me think so hard of N in the gully outlet... then times passes quickly, as when near him.”

2. Undated letter. “Thursday evening”.

3. Undated letter. “Tuesday”.

evocation, sometimes, of amorous games. “Bien c.p.m.d.m.c.” must thus be read: “Bien cher petit minou de mon cœur” (Dearest pussycat of my heart), etc. It is important to take into account the epistolary complexity of those exchanges which, right from the start, are designed to be cryptic by the use of codes, by T. Philippe’s barely decipherable script at times, and by their means of transmission.

As was said in the chapter on L’Eau vive, the degree of secrecy evolves according to T. Philippe’s place of residence and the level of control of his correspondence. At the time of the investigations and the trial (1952-1956), there are thus important variations between the time spent in various religious communities (Sainte-Sabine, Cîteaux, Sept-Fons, Corbara) for one thing and the two years spent at Longueil-Annel in Dr. Préaut’s institution.

For the 1956-1963 period as well, there seems to exist a huge difference between the strict control he is subjected to at the Frattochie Trappe (1956-1959) and looser surveillance exerted on him at Sainte-Sabine. This is evidenced by Anne de Rosanbo’s letter to J. Vanier on the occasion of T. Philippe’s transfer to the Curia generale, in which she indicates:

He may go about a bit in R. [Rome] without socius [escort] to take the fresh air and he intends to ask for a permission to go (1 ce a wk) to P. Gar-Lag [Fr Garrigou-Lagrange]. We’ll thus probably get good pet. [petites] letters. We of course won’t be able to answer, m. pr. N [mais pour N = but for N] it is so much better that way.¹

It is therefore probable that, in the periods when he is under stricter control, T. Philippe’s letters are more rare and are transmitted not by post but by trusted friends allowed to visit him, such as Drs Thompson and Préaut. The carefully planned secret visits are also occasions to get mail exchanges both ways. Before a visit planned for the end of July 1959, T. Philippe thus suggests to J. Vanier:

you could offer Marise, I think, to take advantage of you, and Marg. too, and tell her abit in advance so that she might have time to write.²

1. Anne de Rosanbo’s letter to J. Vanier, Friday, July 10th, 1959, APJV.

2. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, August 1959, APJV.

In 1961, realizing after a visit that he had forgotten to give J. Vanier a letter, he refers to an exchange in the reverse direction:

I found the little note I had written for Marise in the bag and I asked Marie to tell you not to worry too much. I am attaching a new note for her.¹

We therefore guess that bunches of letters are being exchanged and circulate within a small circle of recipients. The result of this mode of writing and circulation – without stamp or postmark, in bunches – is that it makes the dating of some documents more delicate. Let us add that, parallel to this undercover circulation, we notice from T. Philippe’s letters that some of those that J. Vanier sends him still occasionally happen to arrive by the official channel. In that case, however, the contents are carefully pruned to escape possible censorship. This is the meaning of T. Philippe’s advice to J. Vanier in 1959:

Ms. Srtt. [mais surtout = but above all] if you find it all right to write to me officially, do it prudently, so that if the letter is read, it should not have any importance. I shall probably write to you v. soon what to answer to Marg. And Marise.²

How must we understand those official letters? Is it because of the impossibility to correspond otherwise in some periods of reinforced surveillance? At other times one clearly sees that the point is to mislead the authorities by imparting them with false information. We have a very good example in the Autumn of 1959, immediately after T. Philippe has been removed to Sainte-Sabine. He then advises J. Vanier to use an epistolary stratagem to obtain the authorization to officially renew his ties with him:

Concerning Papi [code name of Dominican Paul Philippe of the Holy Office] I wonder if a solution could not first be envisaged, by writing him a letter on occasion, in which you would enclose a letter to me, ms [mais = but] very prudent, very simple at the same time, and you send it to Papi for him to read and forward to Rev Fr Gen. for me if he agrees, asking him to destroy it if he thinks it better to wait some more... vs. [vous = you] may tell him that you have not yet dared to write to me when ly father died, but

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, 1961 or 1962, APJV.

2. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, 1959, APJV.

that now that I am at S.S. [Sainte-Sabine] it is perhaps possible to do it... [...] The letter should be quite simple and so you must say that you are praying for me, but without mentioning spirituality, without saying anything that might give the impression that you are considering me as your spiritual director... but keeping to the domain of family and intellectual friendship. You may say that you are studying for your Ph D under the direction of the Ch. L. [Lallement] and with M [de Menasce] as well as P.M.D. [Marie-Dominique]. I believe that they will let a letter pass more easily than a visit... this is more or less like a trial balloon... and after the letter it is easier a f. months later to apply for a visit... I think what is above all important is to officially renew the contact on the basis of friendship and studies.¹

Beside the use of codes, the dissimulation of identities and information has offers a wide range of possibilities. Some letters are thus typed to camouflage the author's handwriting:

You will alws be able to send mea note, since Oct. not a single was open bt one mst alws be prudent. Whenever you can it may be better to type the address for the Fr. Gen. can always recognize a handwriting, for Pa it is not important. And if you could not write or the letter did not arrive, you can alws phone on arriving, as we had agreed for Marg. with you.²

They also change their handwritings, signatures are invented, codes are agreed on to make dates. According to T. Philippe, Jacqueline d'Halluin is the most gifted:

I think Pa is the one that knows how to change her handwriting best (y. may also type the letter and sign with an unknown signature). Please indicate the day (exactly one month ahead as had been agreed) saying that it is the anniversary of our first meeting (a few years before, without saying how many...)³

Under T. Philippe's pen, the phrase: "Mary's diplomatic bag"⁴ designs the whole system of means to by-pass authorities, encode and

1. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, October-December 1959, APJV.

2. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, New Year 1961 or 1962, APJV.

3. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, end of June-early July 1959, APJV.

4. The phrase appears in one of the first letters in the correspondence, inserted in a sentence that heralds the general tone: "My dearest Jean, I think that Mary desires me to send you these few lines through Mary's diplomatic bag; I shall write you an official letter [some day], this one is quite private and hidden", T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, May 1952, APJV.

camouflage which are jauntily assimilated to Providence and to the "providential will" of the "TSV" (la Très Sainte Vierge = the Most Holy Virgin), who "watches" over the "tout-petits" (the little ones).

We must try to understand the circumstances that have led this little group to develop a veritable culture of duplicity, by-passing of authorities and secret, which they, abusing the evangelical term, call a "hidden life". For if those practices of dissimulation are made necessary, in their eyes, by the surveillance exerted by the Church, they are often unduly stuck to. We understand them, from the point of view of the authors, in the case of T. Philippe's letters to J. Vanier, since the monk is under constant surveillance. But the question is posed differently for the letters exchanged between Anne de Rosambo, Jacqueline d'Halluin and J. Vanier. They all three live autonomous lives. Neither the Church nor their families control their correspondences. Similarly, in so far as T. Philippe's letters circulate under cover, outside his superiors' control, did they really need to remain coded? Of course, the fear in that case that they might fall into the wrong hands must have played a part. But is not all this at the same time a telltale sign that the group is sinking into a universe of double game, secrecy and hush-hush? How to explain the implementation of those means of coding? Is it not a proof of excessive fear? It is the sign that the little group are acquiring a taste for undercover action, is sinking into it, clinging to their codes like to rites practice among themselves in an exclusive and sectarian mood. The use of the code signifies an initiation and a belonging. To analyze the network, its inner functioning, its language, culture, sexuality, explicit or latent, its perceptions of the outside, its representations, etc., the historical scope of the "NFA" documents, vastly mobilized by the Study Commission, is absolutely fundamental.

THE LETTERS IN THE NOTEBOOKS: "BELOVED! BELOVED! BELOVED!"

Apart from the "NFA" file, J. Vanier also kept almost all his notebooks from 1965 to 2019. An important mass of documents was inserted in them: visit cards, New Year cards, announcements of births, deaths, marriages, cloth taking and ordinations, lists of names, of addresses and telephone numbers, programmes of events, prayers, relics of Padre Pio, numerous photos of families and L'Arche communities, metro tickets, private letters, etc.

Surviving in the notebooks, those letters have escaped the overall destruction of a larger correspondence to which the historian no longer has access. There are 50 of them, from an extreme variety of interlocutors: assistants and officials of L'Arche, friends who send photos of their children ("Dear Jean, this is 'a bit' of our heart", 1985), letters signed with a hardly legible Christian name or whose author cannot be identified ("your little sister" in a letter sent from India on September 12th, 1982), There is a letter from his Cistercian brother dated October 23rd, 1983 about their young brother Michel, with a reference in it of tensions inside the family: "There is a lot of healing yet to be done". Two letters from cardinals are to be found. One is from Cardinal Paul Philippe, now at the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, dated October 28th, 1975, on the occasion of T. Philippe and J. Vanier's pilgrimage to Rome. The other, dated September 5th, 1986, is from Cardinal Lustiger who could not honour an invitation from J. Vanier. One also finds a letter from the Hauts-de-Seine MP, Hubert Balança, who offers to meet J. Vanier (September 13th, 1967), one from Mary Frances Coady (January 17th, 1985), who already at the time envisages to write a biography of the Vanier parents, etc.

The letters preserved often aim at thanking J. Vanier: "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you for everything! God help you and give you health" (1983), "Thank you again for the joy of returning together" (1983), "Jean, my beloved, thank you for the time you gave me yesterday, thank God, thank you"¹. There are letters asking for prayers, because "one must live with one's insecurity and the indelible wounds of the past looking up to Jesus day after day". Tenderness is often expressed: "I kiss you with all my tenderness (yet to be made more tender!)" (1987).

J. Vanier obviously arouses *passion* among his female correspondents. We remark quite an amount of letters that are spiritually ambiguous and theologically rather suggestive, at the border of the carnal and the spiritual. This is a trait common to all those women, who do not know one another but are all writing in the same mode, in literary forms generated by himself. There is actually something of a mimetic order in the correspondences which, often under the aspect of nominal poetry, with a

1. Letter to J. Vanier, signed "N", 1975 notebook, APJV

jumbled syntax, reproduce J. Vanier's poetical productions, published in the collections *Tears of silence* (1970) or *Eruptions to hope* (1971).

The Carmelite nuns' letters from the "NFA" file are completed by letters from three nuns from different Carmels. From a Cognac Carmelite we can thus read a note sent from the Reposoir Carmel in February 1968:

For three days spent near our Sweet Jesus when you were always with me.
Yours in Jesus.¹

From another nun of the Abbeville Carmel, we can read:

How I do like to come and meet you in Rome, pray and love with you – always as if it were the first time – and the last time – with the impetus and the heat of Mary's love for you.²

We also find letters from a Carmelite who is in England and signs with her religious name: "Rachel de Bethléem" [username] or sometimes "Your Rachel of Jesus and Mary". This nun, an American from Chicago³, is a former resident of the Abbeville Carmel. She entered it in October 1973, took the cloth in 1974 and took her vows in 1976. The six letters that she sends J. Vanier between 1978 and 1990 are in English. She seems to be very much in love with Jesus and with J. Vanier in Jesus:

Beloved Jean, Beloved of Jesus and Mary" ; "My beloved Jean of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary" ; "Jean so loved and Gift of God filled and always being more filled with Jesus". "I thank Jesus that I can offer myself with you – I can't do it alone and He does not seem to want it alone. Yes I offer my life with yours to the Father⁴.

J. Vanier seems to be very strongly linked to Rachel de Bethléem's vocation who says she enters the Carmel "not to be separated from" him:

1. Unsigned, undated card sent to J. Vanier, 1968 notebook, APJV. This is probably from Mother Myriam.

2. Unsigned, undated letter, sent to J. Vanier, 1978 notebook, APJV. The handwriting reveals the calligraphy and the style of Sister Marie-Madeleine Wambergue, an Abbeville Carmelite.

3. J. Vanier's letter to Mary Cesar, September 12 1975, APJV : "Sister Rachel of Bethlehem is the Carmelite sister that I have known for many years now. She comes from Chicago."

4. Sister Rachel de Bethléem's letter to J. Vanier, 1989 notebook, APJV.

Somewhere very deep in me I do know that you are with me and that I am with you (I entered Carmel because I couldn't see how to live separated from you). 'Jesus is pleased with me', you tell me.¹

Many letters also come from women committed to L'Arche, scattered over the world in L'Arche foundations. They keep a link with J. Vanier, with the Trosly centre and L'Arche through letters. In one of those, dated December 16th, 1975 and only signed "C", which takes the form of a poem, we can read:

Beloved,
 Most precious one
 Your love dancing in my heart
 Setting me free
 To dance in His heart
 And some – timeless-times
 To fly [...]
 My beloved
 Quietly feasting on the life
 Of our secret feasts with Him
 The lifting of our veils
 The kiss of our shores
 Breathing this Birth
 Becoming one Temple
 Being built onto the touch
 Of His feet [...]
 I kiss you in His coming
 Beloved of my heart.
 C.

Under the pen of Léa, on a mission abroad for L'Arche in the years 1970-1980, we read similar phrases, combining theology and love, of Jesus and J. Vanier mixed together. Thus in a letter of 1978:

I am thankful for you, for all the beauty of Jesus in you... I am thankful that you are close... that Jesus unites us in His fire... and I carry you quietly in my heart... asking that Jesus help us each day grow in greater fidelity... I rest with you in His heart... and in his Presence. Je t'embrasse avec tendresse. Léa²

1. Sister Rachel de Bethléem's letter to J. Vanier, September 27, 1990, agenda, APJV.
 2. Léa's letter to J. Vanier, February 20th, 1978, 10 p., APJV.

This from another letter from Léa in 1983:

Thank you for your fidelity to me – and I remain close. Jesus deepens the Unity that has been given. Je t'embrasse en Lui. Peace to you¹.

In 1989, a woman, Barbara, no surname, writes to J. Vanier:

Beloved of Jesus – pardon pour tout ce qui n'est pas espace de repos pour toi en moi. May Jesus take up our poverty in his offering².

The same begins a letter in 1997 with the apostrophe: "Beloved! beloved! beloved!"³.

In 1989, another, "Catarina" [username] writes to J. Vanier along the same lines:

Thank you for your letter, written after Syria and the Synod. You seemed so tired then, and in some anguish but nevertheless so tenderly rending gentle grace and love. I do appreciate you deeply, Jean. I hope you know that. And I pray that Jesus will use the gift of communion He gives us to bring lightness, grace and joy in your heart².

Dear little one, You are Mary's beloved little one – truly beloved and growing in littleness³.

Writing lovingly amounts to rewriting the liturgical mystery, with inclusions of phrases from the Psalms ("De Profundis") or from the Song of Songs as a subtext, in more than ambiguous terms:

Mon petit, Beloved in Jesus, My whole being gives praise and thanks for so much received in, from, through you. A mystery so foolish, so incomprehensible, yet so life-giving, so true. And it is clear that we have been called now to live the mystery even more interiorly, in absence, in abstinence and fasting, and yet, my heart and all that I am, are opened even more than ever to receive and embrace the mystery of you and of this love and communion given us. Yet this hour, made sacred by the gift makes me cry out from my depths – come beloved. [...] I come when you call. I come when you need me. I come in love and grace and all tenderness – hopefully in conformity with the new creation of Yahveh – 'a woman will enfall the man in tenderness' – O beloved, my absent love, my deepest love, beloved of Jesus, thank you⁴."

1. Léa's letter to J. Vanier, April 9th, 1983, APJV.

2. Catarina's letter to J. Vanier, June 5th, 1989, APJV.

3. Catarina's letter to J. Vanier, September 21st, 1989, APJV.

4. Catarina's letter to J. Vanier, undated, 4 p. 2006 notebook, APJV.

The difficulties posed by those passive correspondences – very suggestive as was said before, is repeated here and can be verified in Catarina’s letter above, combining fasting, abstinence, tenderness, marital submissiveness – nevertheless reside in a correct interpretation of those documents. We not only do not know how J. Vanier answers Catarina’s letters, for instance, but the latter is not even identified. How close to L’Arche is she? What is her personal, psychological profile? Is she under a hold, seduced or simply in love? Her last words underline both her tender love and the absence of the beloved one. From some of J. Vanier’s correspondents, we only catch a glimpse through a unique letter, although their feelings for him are rather transparent. So, for instance, a letter from a young woman that signs “B”, dated July 28th, 1969:

b.a. [Bien aimé = beloved], a fortnight without the grace of your presence and there is nothing that can replace this presence. Nothing at all. [...]. I don’t want to live my own life any more, let it all be yours – for you. [...] I love, I have loved you all night. B¹

The analysis of those passive correspondences will be prolonged in the next chapters with that of some of J. Vanier’s female correspondents: especially Jacqueline d’Halluin, Anne de Rosambo, the Carmelite nuns, etc. One can nevertheless take it for granted from now on that the letters received by J. Vanier that let us hear women’s voices are, at least by consent, partaking of a love process, even if we cannot always exactly define the circumstances.

Is it the pure coincidence of the conservation of those documents or singular data that need to be more carefully interpreted, but a number of those letters are in English (“C”, “Léa”, “Barbara”, “Catarina”, etc.

Active correspondences : J. Vanier : a letter-writer of intimacy?

J. Vanier’s active correspondences pose questions that are not easier to solve. Altogether, the Study Commission has found about 1 000 letters written by J. Vanier, more than half of which are written to his parents.

1. “B”’s letter to J. Vanier, July 28th 1969, 3 p. APJV. “B” is a young francophone, who last met J. Vanier around mid-July 1969 and is arriving in C, when he himself arrives in Montreal and Ottawa in August.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. It is certain that, in the years to come, more letters will come out to light and change the historical perspective.

J. VANIER AS LETTER-WRITER: ATTEMPT AT AN INVENTORY

Active correspondences retrieved and communicated to the Study Commission

Author	Recipient	Period	Where to be found	Number
J. Vanier	Georges and Pauline Vanier	1938 – 1970	APJV Trosly	506
J. Vanier	Mère Marguerite - Marie	1954-1972	ADM Meaux	88
J. Vanier	Daniel-Joseph Lallement	1953-1962	AICP Paris	18
J. Vanier	Daniel-Joseph Lallement	1954 – sans date	ADM Meaux	3
J. Vanier	Catherine Doherty	1970-1974	Madonna House Archives Combermere	2
J. Vanier	Tim Hollis	1951-1981	Archives Tim Hollis (UK)	4
J. Vanier	“Brigitte”	1987-2019	Private archives passed on to the commission	132
J. Vanier	“Francesca”	2005-2008	Private archives passed on to the commission	84
J. Vanier	“Amy”	1973-1990	Private archives passed on to the commission	37
J. Vanier	Anne-Marie de la Selle	1967-1968 (pour celles qui sont datées)	Private archives passed on to the commission	41
J. Vanier	Karin Donaldson	1977-2018	Private archives passed on to the commission under the form of transcripts and account of the letters	26
TOTAL				941

The nature, contents and recipients of those letters are extremely varied. To his Ph.D. supervisor, J. Vanier naturally owes informative letters, which

are not ambiguous and whose content was exploited in the first part of the report. Those sent to the nuns, assistants, married women are not always similar. They are complex, for instance those written to Mother Marguerite-Marie or sister “Francesca”, a Poor Clare nun. They are deprived of any ambiguity with “Brigitte”, a married woman, the mother of children.

LETTERS TO MOTHER MARGUERITE-MARIE (1954-1972):
“CLOSE THE EYES OF YOUR INTELLIGENCE”.

We would like to enter in depth into one correspondence particularly and comment large chunks of J. Vanier’s correspondence with Mother Marguerite-Marie (1904-1984), which gives early evidence of T. Philippe’s influence on J. Vanier’s style and enables one to observe the diffusion by the latter of T. Philippe’s doctrines, apart from their assimilation. He invites the nun to join the circle of the “tout-petits” (little ones)¹. In a sense the disciple begins to recruit. Abundant, this correspondence is significant of theological deviations and of a certain spiritual style that are, so to speak, caught sight of in their native state.

The archives of the Meaux diocese are the ones that signaled to the Study Commission that they owned a documentary fund relative to the “Pious Union of the Little Sisters of the Holy Virgin”, founded in Paris in 1945 by Canon Lallement and installed in Thomery. In this fund one can remark the presence of nearly ninety letters sent by J. Vanier to Mother Marguerite-Marie between 1954 and 1972.² One also finds a set of handwritten rough copies of J. Vanier’s thesis, of some of his articles and lectures, correspondences between J. Vanier and Canon Lallement, Pauline Vanier and the Little Sisters (about 75 letters), between Canon

1. J. Vanier’s letter to Mother Marguerite-Marie, sent from Casa Pace, Fatima, on Saint Agnes, 2 January 21st, no year indicated [1960 ?], 2 p.: “Let us then be among his tout-petits all hidden in Jesus – who live on his mercy only, who suc [sic] on his mercy and rest there in that drink of love who are too little to be hidden by God’s motherly arm, who constantly need the mother’s arm of love.”

2. See especially files (ADM): 76 W 42 (6 letters from “Little John”, aka. J. Vanier, 1971-1972); 76 W 43 (a dossier on the Vanier family. Papercuts in French, English; excerpts from J. Vanier’s thesis; a letter from Marguerite-Marie to an unknown recipient, 1967; 76 W 44 (3 letters from J. Vanier to Fr Lallement; 82 letters from J. Vanier to Mother Marguerite-Marie (1954 – 1972); rough copies of letters from Mother Marguerite-Marie to Pauline Vanier and to J. Vanier, especially on the occasion of Georges Vanier’s death, (March 5th 1967); 76 W 47 (photographs).

Lallement and Georges and Pauline Vanier, as well as several dossiers relating to L’Arche¹. The whole documentary set is a first-rate source to shed light on the period stretching from L’Eau vive to the beginning of the 1960s. Without being at the heart of the institutional system of L’Arche, the sisters of Thomery are a link in the network: the community gravitates around L’Eau vive and the foundation of L’Arche. The links between J. Vanier and the nuns are there to last. A few sisters are present at L’Eau vive as early as the end of the 1940s and, right until the middle of the 1980s, welcome a certain number of L’Arche members in their domain of Thomery, East of Fontainebleau in a fold of the Seine in the Seine-et-Marne, for retreats and periods of rest.

J. Vanier’s letters to Mother Marguerite-Marie offer an expression deprived of any elaborate theology of the union in love and of any mystic discourse continuing T. Philippe’s doctrines. In a letter to J. Vanier, the latter admits that he does not know the nun and invites him² to prudence with the outside⁶⁰. In the exchange of letters, we can observe a veritable verbal goo on the theme of love: “the love of Jesus” becomes the basis of morality; the nun is invited to give up intelligence and privilege a religion of love; Jesus is “the sole spouse”; J. Vanier is “the victim of his wounded Love”; the two correspondents meet in “tranquillity”³. Did Mother

1. File 76 W 42 (Bernard Lallemand, Pamela Dillon, Louise Joly); file 76 W 47 (“L’Arche and its residents with the Little Sisters”, 1985).

2. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, APJV, 4 p., sd. (1959 ?): “I have read your little notes and I am esply taking in my o. [= orison] The little mother from Tm. [Thomery], you’d do well to mention her to Pi who can help you. I think mch prudence is nded 1/ because of the Ch. L. [Canon Lallement] 2/ and perhaps of the temperament of the little mother, I do not know her personally bt it is sure that the Good Lord can give himself even t persons a bit deranged. It is so hard, besides, in that domain to establish the limit between an extremely sensitive nature ... and physically very weak, and someone a bit cranky, ntwithstdng the fact that the devil may interfere. Her case seems to me a bit like Paulette’s, I believe that this may enlighten you to perhaps help her on occasion, bt while being doubly prudent, both for yourself and for her».

3. J. Vanier’s letter to Mother Marguerite-Marie, undated, ADM: “Just a word to let you know how ttally united to you I remain. I am asking so hard to Jesus your sole spouse to keep you b. [bien = well] in him, all little... like me all p. [petite] victim of his Love wounded in his body by fatigues and illness. But Jesus loves you... and this is enough for us. I could come to Thomery next week Monday evening or Tuesday evening... or later. Is there a moment when you will be less disturb [sic] ? I do ask Jesis to bless this new p. [petit = short] stay so that it might be all peace and love both for Him and [illegible word].”

Marguerite-Marie favourably welcomed J. Vanier's suggestions? We are reduced to wonder – without being able to give a definite answer – whether the nun possibly betrayed the statutes of her community¹.

Les Petites Sœurs de de la Sainte Vierge
(*The Little Sisters of the Holy Virgin*)

The community of the Petites Sœurs de la Sainte Vierge is officially founded in Paris in 1945 by Canon Lalement. It stems from a previous attempt at a foundation, that of “the Carmel of thanksgivings”, the prioress of which, Mother Marie-Thérèse, dies in 1943. There is a time of gestation between 1943 and 1945 with first consecrations to the Virgin, retreats, oblations, gifts of the veil, writing of the statutes, etc. The new community receives the name of “Petites Sœurs de la Sainte Vierge” after a retreat preached by Marie-Dominique Philippe in September 1944²:

You must not leave the feet of Our Lord. [...] The contemplative life that is yours to lead must be spiritually poor, so that you may be more docile to the hold of the Holy Spirit.

For them to lead a “hidden and poor” contemplative life, Marie-Dominique Philippe invites the nuns to place themselves “in the dependence of the Holy Virgin: “the heart of the Holy Virgin will be the wall of your cloister”, he explains. In December, the first perpetual vows are taken, at the Paris archbishopric, by two women, Mother Marguerite-Marie and Mother Marie-Élisabeth, who will in turn be prioresses of the community. In December 1945, two other women take temporary vows. The first collective mission of the sisters in 1946, a mission on which there are few factual elements to be found in the archives of the community, is in Soisy-sur-Seine, at L'Eau vive exactly.

At the beginning of 1946, the community leaves Paris to establish itself at Thomery in the so-called “Stella Maris” house. This is a religious

1. Articles 77 et 78 of the statutes of Petites Sœurs de la Sainte Vierge, ADM. “The Petites Sœurs de la Sainte Vierge, at the same time as they profess and for the same duration, take the private vow of perfect chastity. The Mothers Superior will maternally and diligently watch over all that might breach on the integrity of the consecration of the Petites Sœurs to God alone.”

2. Retreat book of the nuns. The original of the predication can be found in the archives of the Frères de Saint-Jean, in Rimont.

house, with a chapel and a Lourdes grotto at the end of the garden. In 1950, two sisters go on a pilgrimage to Rome, to participate in the ceremonies of the proclamation of the Assumption dogma. In 1951, a sign of recognition is the visit of Mgr Roncalli, the Apostolic Nuncio in Paris:

I have been very happy to be acquainted with those Little Sisters, he writes in his diary. They are basically what the ‘prêtres-ouvriers’ (worker-priests) should be, but they are so much better prepared, inspired and disciplined! I wish with all my heart that the Lord may make them proper and bless them!¹

In 1955, Marie-Dominique Philippe goes there again to give talks. He comes back in 1959 preach a recollection. In 1956, it is the turn of Charles de Koninck, a philosopher and theologian from Université Laval in Quebec, a friend of Canon Lallement and of Jacques de Monléon, to come there for a series of presentations. This said the vocations are few. Most of the entries take place between 1945 and 1950. There is none any more after 1960. The twelve sisters or so in the community are committed to the pastoral activities of the parish of Thomery. The last sisters leave “Stella Maris” in 2008, to go and live the home for aged nuns kept by the Benedictine sisters of Faremoutiers.

Two figures appear as “framing” the group, Mother Marie-Élisabeth and Mother Marguerite-Marie. The latter was born in Belgium on June 10th, 1904 as Fanny, Stéphanie, Marguerite De Néeff. A close friend of Fr Delau's, the Philippes' uncle, she reads him texts by St Thomas Aquinas once he becomes blind.² Together with Marguerite Tournous and Dr Simone Leuret, whom we find again at L'Eau vive, she is a member of Canon Lallement's Thomist circles and is studying philosophy at Institut catholique de Paris at the beginning of the Second World War. She enters the projected foundation in June 1943, takes perpetual vows in 1945 as we said. She is the Novice Mistress and then Mother Superior of the community. She dies on December 26th, 1984. The archives do not enable one to establish the psychological portrait of a nun who seems to have had real intellectual qualities. Her health, conversely, does not seem to have been all that strong.

1. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, *Journal de France*, volume II, Cerf, 2008, p. 463.

2. See Canon Lallement's biography, Georges Maurel et Yves Huet de Barochez, *Un sage pour notre temps*, Paris, Téqui, 1998, p. 255.

Marguerite-Marie and J. Vanier meet at L'Eau vive in the early 1950s; they talk philosophy together; she reads his writings for his Ph D; their correspondence indicates exchanges on the (omnipresent) philosophical and theological question of love, J. Vanier seeming at times to become the spiritual counselor of a nun 25-years older than him.¹

The archives hold a few rough copies of letters that the nun sends to J. Vanier. The tone is intense, the confusion of sentiments here again perceptible. In the heavily scribbled out rough copy of a text written little after Georges Vanier's death (March 5th, 1967), in a time of mourning and consolation, we can read:

Jean, I did not know yet how each moment of your life was part of my heart beats... In this hour when ~~your you are going to know separation when something in you gets broken of you I can only pray plunge you deeper into the~~ I plunge for you and with you into the sorrowful mystery of Mary close to the Cross².

In another rough copy, one may again read what follows, with a passage from “vous” to a more intimate “tu”:

I am praying for you in the offering of all my being, all my life to Jesus so that he may give you to continue His work of Love throughout the whole

1. See for instance his letter to Mother Marguerite-Marie, sent from Fatima, on October 14th [1960]: “You know how united and near you I remain... We only have to let the E.S. [l'Esprit Saint = the Holy Spirit] purify us and take us: the mystery of Love is great. Oh no! It does not rest in Méta[physics], nor in ethics, nor ppt [properment = properly] in theology considered as a speculative science. The mystery of Love cannot be distinguished from the mystery of the E.S. . It is ppt part of what J ; de S. Th. [Jean de Saint-Thomas] calls mystic theo [théologie]. And in this domain, one is quite little, quite weak, for it is the E.S. that loves in us: we entirely depend on it. Beside it, one can only perform b. [bien = quite] paltry actions –acts of will sustained by divine grace to call on the E.S. to come deeper into us. There is no logic in this mystery of love: no law ppt. said for it depends *primo* and *per se* on God's Good Pleasure. On Earth, we actually live not in a state of love, but in a state of sacrifice: only in heaven shall we in a state of love. The prime and fundamental drift demanded by love on Earth remains the gift of sacrifice and of the Cross... And Jesus asks us above all to live incessantly in thanksgiving for everything. One is nothingness and Jesus looked into our nothingness... We have so much to thank him for... [...] I am praying so hard the Unique Spouse for him to keep you – to wrap you inside him... to take you inside His heart so that you might live on confidence and love... Ask him to help me b. b. [bien bien] petit, b. b. poor, so that I may let him be totally free in me.”

2. Rough copy of a letter from Marguerite-Marie to J. Vanier, March 1967, ADM, 76 W 44.

Earth. Let Him keep you in the extraordinary transparency that leads us where you are. I cannot separate it from this prophecy of Simeon to Jesus: ‘*Lumen ad revelationem gentium*’. This prayer, it is not my sisterly imagination that invents it is achieved through You. And I cannot evade it no more than the little light of the tabernacle¹.

A Mystic of love conceived without sin

Those letters invite us to wonder about the possible mystico-sexual relationships between J. Vanier and the nun. Although they invite to consider things in that perspective, they do not allow for a clearcut opinion. So, for instance in the following letter where the punctuation – and especially the suspension marks – are from J. Vanier:

The Good Jesus has not left me with much free time. But you know that in spite of distances and separations He keeps me closely united to you. And I am waiting for Him to give me two or three days' free time to come to you so that we might have a little retreat together... plunge ourselves again into Divine Love... He is the Merciful Love of Jesus whom we must so fully trust. He loves us so much. What he expects from us is not our fear in His adoration but our poor hearts of flesh... Let us confidently wait for Him to arrange the days of our meeting again... And let us ask Mary and the Spirit to themselves lead well the p. [petite = little] retreat that we shall have together...²

The ambiguity is skillfully maintained. The vocabulary used is spiritualized. The “fleshly” relation, between “hearts of flesh” is referred to under the vocable of “little retreat”; it is called up by the image of the “plunge into Divine Love”. It is delicate to draw conclusions: the present letter fragment cultivates ambiguity and translates J. Vanier's difficulty to simply say things. The words used enable us to measure how much deeper than a simple spiritual friendship that relationship is. They wish to meet up “at night”. They are looking for “tranquility” and a kind of solitude just the two of them. J. Vanier invites the nun to come to his place in Paris, in his little room because

1. Rough copy of a letter from Marguerite-Marie to J. Vanier, ADM, 76 W 44.
2. J. Vanier's letter to Mother Marguerite-Marie, undated, end of the 1950s, ADM.

it will be “quiet”.¹ They “retreat” together, the convent becomes a “nest of love”, an “oasis of love”.² Vanier mentions both God’s “pleasure” and “our poor hearts of flesh”. The ritual ampula appears as the code of their relationship. A whole fabric of very fleshly words is also woven into the correspondence, altogether reflecting “incarnation”, “communion” and linguistic deviation. J. Vanier and the nun are “united” (in prayer) and in “very deep union” (in Jesus’ heart); we “penetrate” (the mysteries through Love); we are “nestled in the bosom” (of the Immaculate); one must “burrow into” (God’s heart), seek the “Good Pleasures” (of God). In the letters, God’s or Mary’s “pleasure”, in which it is hard not to also possibly read that of those who pray and “retreat together” appears as a recurrent figure:

Thank you for your ltl. note and your prayers. Let us remain tt. petit [quite little], tt. glued against Mary and always wait for “the hour of her pleasure”.

I was a bit sorry not to see more of you at Stella Maris last week – But Jesus allowed it so... But Jesus always urges me so hard to keep you near him... Let us plunge deep into his heart, as tt. petits, tt. close to him... And let us rest there together. Or, if it His good pleasure, let us give him our poor hearts to unite them to his agonizing heart.

J. Vanier’s letters also bear the trace of insistence on some theological stakes: Jesus as a child, nuns as brides of Christ, Christ as the unique bridegroom³, etc. This enables us to see a form of turning

1. J. Vanier’s letter to Mother Marguerite-Marie, undated, 1961, ADM: “I am back in Paris to be with my parents. I am leaving presently for Fribourg to give a talk at Pax Romana. Please pray for it and keep it for your eyes alone. On the 28th and 29th. I shall be in Paris but shall not be able to go to Thomery. If Jesus is willing, he will perhaps find a means of conveyance to bring his little bride to Paris, We shall be able to see each other place Vauban: it is very quite [sic]. But please do not take the trip if this must cause fatigue. I shall be back in Paris from August 15th to 30th.”

2. J. Vanier’s letter to Mother Marguerite-Marie, September 7th, 1961, ADM: “You know how much I am praying for that little oasis of love, that little nest of love and peace that Stella Maris must be.”

3. J. Vanier’s letter to Mother Marguerite-Marie, January 31st (early 1960), ADM, sent from his room, 15 Place Vauban: “I am asking the Unique Bridegroom to take you and plunge you into the confidence of Love, in the confidence of the Bride who totally offers herself to the Sp. And knows that she is loved by him.”

about of evangelical values. J. Vanier’s “force” is in the repeated confession of his weakness and the insistent reformulation of his “littleness”. He endlessly underlines his poverty, his misery, and this insufficiency of his seems to become a ruse of harmlessness and innocence. By dint of his saying that he is “broken”, this “breaking” also become a means of seduction. Is this a stray interpretation of St Paul? Similarly, the bride’s “beauty” is her “poverty”, her “littleness”. For J. Vanier, love is to be defined as a “blessed night of the intelligence”¹, a definition of love that is quite un-classical in Catholicism – at least under this aspect – but is nevertheless susceptible to send back to other spiritual horizons². The invitation to give up “speculative intelligence” is repeated again and again:

Jesus above all wants us to penetrate those mysteries through Love, through the life of love and not only through speculative intelligence: “Close the eyes of your intelligence”³.

The correspondence is on the whole exempt from any confession of feelings of sin or guilt since “God” gives himself in the relationship and “the Bridgroom’s name is Mercy”. Under the appearance of a kind of theological poetry sounding like a song of innocence, J. Vanier does not see where the disorder lies and reassures the nun. In one letter, we thus find the clear formulation of mystic thought as *deprived of any moral basis*, without any consideration of objective morality and in which mercy absolves all the deviations :

1. J. Vanier’s letter to Mother Marguerite-Marie, Casa Pace, Fatima, December 3rd, no year mentioned [1959 ?], 1 p. ; “Let us dive really hard, totally, into that blessed night of the intelligence that Love is and let us plunge deeper into that place so suave that the heat of the Immaculate is.»

2. See for instance the work, almost contemporary with that exchange of letters: Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, Vintage Books, New York, 1962. Hofstadter devotes the first part of his essay to Puritanical anti-intellectualism, the religion of the heart, protestant evangelism and there would he be a lead for an analysis indeed.

3. J. Vanier’s letter to Mother Marguerite-Marie, Vézelay, Transfiguration of Jesus, August 6th, 1960, 3 p.

In the long run, what one does is not important provided one do [sic] what little Jesus wishes, provided we are his little toy...¹

Theological aberrations

There is little information as to J. Vanier's own activities, the persons he meets, his trips, his everyday life and his social life in the letters retrieved. On the contrary, his correspondence is saturated with Marian mystic, Christic and Trinitarian obsession and, we might be tempted to say, with a form of mystagogy. In his letters, the emotional and the spiritual become indissociable. The theological objects that return insistently are Jesus's and Mary's hearts, the child Jesus, the crib, the gift of God's love, the mystery of divine Love, Mary's love for the baby Jesus, the Holy Spirit's hold that opens the soul to divine Love and to which must be quite submissive". One is struck by the apparent ease with which a religious style flows from J. Vanier's pen. But behind this style, changes of meaning are frequent enough. The images follow one another in a disjointed way, building up a wobbly theology. The debatable image of the *child-spouse* applied to the nun does not allow to pass on to that of the *child* who, *sleeping* in his mother's arms, has "blind confidence in his heavenly Father, nor to that of the glowing bride. So in an undated letter:

Good Jesus gives me much time here to stay with him and you know how much I ask him to keep his tiny little child of a bride. This mystery of nuptials is a very great mystery. The little child sleeps in his mother's arms: he has blind confidence in his Heavenly Father, but the bride loves with burning love.

1. J. Vanier's letter to Mother Marguerite-Marie, no place, no date, 2 p.: "In the long run, what one does is not important provided one do [sic] what little Jesus wishes, provided we are his little toy... Let us only let him to increase this thirst... We must be burning with thirst... We must desire ardently. Jesus came down on our poor Earth because of sin, because of that poverty of sin... and because of this thirst of the Immaculate... We can also stoke Love for we are weak, poor – sinners – but sinners hidden in the bosom of the Immaculate. She can't Jesus above all wants us to penetrate those mysteries through Love, through the life of love and not only through speculative intelligence: "Close the eyes of your intelligence then give us her thirst." Ibidem : "The bridegroom loves it so much when the Bride gives him all – all her weaknesses, all her poverty, all her desires. He loves it so much that she should remain the Poor one, the little poor one – who only shows her poverty. Her beauty *is* her poverty, her littleness – this is what attracts the Bridegroom's name: mercy.»

We are here in a type of poetic formulation, insane theologically speaking if taken in its continuity, embroidering on themes dear to the milieu of the Philippe brothers and concludes on the nun burning with bridal love. The question of the passage from the "Holy Spirit's hold" to "spiritual hold" would be worth scrutinizing more closely, but the link between the two is established in somehow contracting and crushing the theological sense:

Do let us let *the Holy Spirit and Mary* shape us for their eternal designs of love. Jesus above all wants us to penetrate those mysteries through Love, through the life of love and not only through speculative intelligence. And for that purpose, one needs to be so little, so *submissive to the Holy Spirit*. One must let oneself be guided by Mary's heart, by Rebecca, who instructs young Jacob in such an unexpected way.

On the one hand, the association of Mary and Rebecca, who betrays her husband's confidence by making Jacob stand for his elder son Esau, is not self-evident. On the other, giving up "speculative intelligence, i. e. natural intelligence, becomes "submissiveness" to the Spirit, associated with Mary and Rebecca by way of a confusion between the different meanings of the word "intelligence" and a crushing of nature. The pattern sounds very Philippe-like: giving up natural intelligence and discernment to fall into the hold of the Holy Spirit's gifts of wisdom and intelligence.

Mother Marguerite-Marie does not belong to the first circle of "the initiate", that of the "tout petits" (little ones) gathered around T. Philippe, but to a second circle of persons very close to him, who, united by links of friendship, spirituality, geography and practices, gravitate around that nucleus. Is it by a slip of J. Vanier's pen? A phrase in the correspondence would perhaps invite to classify the nun among the first circle of initiated women. In a letter without any indication of date or place, he writes to her using the name "N", from the "NFA" namecode, that indicates T. Philippe, who is compared to Christ:

Thank you for your little note, which I received in Rome. Yes I do pray very hard for all your intentions. Let us above all remain very, very faithful to Love, to the so soft demands of Merciful Love. It is so good to become very weak, very little to be shaken by Love... And if Love hides itself behind the veils of Faith, let us remain very faithful to hidden Love...

waiting for the Bridegroom that is to come... Let us ask above all that N. come shortly. Veni Domine... Your little ones are calling.

Whether this is a slip of the pen or not, the letter this time associates the nun with the group of the “little children”, the “tout-petits”. It is however unique in J. Vanier’s correspondence and therefore does not permit to include the nun for sure among the followers and practitioners of the doctrines of T. Philippe himself. Whatever the case may be, the numerous letters that have been kept enable us to characterize the relationship between J. Vanier and the nun as much as the style of J. Vanier’s letter-writing itself: ambiguous, affectionate, loving, prayerful, hostile to intelligence. In this correspondence with Mother Marguerite-Marie, the gender relation is both understated, widespread, never explicit, always underlying, poetized, spiritualized, through letters that are probably also a *locus* of seduction among others.

LETTERS TO BRIGITTE (1987-2019): “I AM GIVING YOU MY BODY”

With Brigitte, the epistolary expression is quite something else. In order to help the Study Commission, Brigitte took the initiative to transmit the copies, digitalized and collected into digital format, of the 132 letters she received from J. Vanier. The first letter dates from 1987. The bulk of the exchange is from the years 1980-1990, but the exchange is prolonged until the last years of J. Vanier’s life. Brigitte had interviews with the Commission, so that, to the difference of Mother Marguerite-Marie, we, on top of the letters, have her verbal explanations, which confirm the *equally sexual* character of the relation. In the letters, we find theological stakes that are similar to those found in the correspondence with Mother Marguerite-Marie – probably simplified with the passing of time, and so to speak more “flippant”, as we shall see. J. Vanier’s part of anxiety is more perceptible and, on reading them, we can grasp its *literary expression*. Compared with the previous correspondence, a certain number of inhibitions have been dropped. Is this the effect of J. Vanier’s different status, from Ph D candidate in the years 1950-1960 to founder of many communities in the years 1980-1990, of his having matured, having acquired growing responsibilities, T. Philippe death (in 1983), an inner psychological evolution or getting on in age? To measure the change in the style of letter-writing, we may

quote the letter dated June 3rd, 2006, in which J. Vanier does not hesitate to mention his genitals, qualified as “sacred”:

I am to [undergo] a prostate operation in Reims next Thursday. I shall be in hospital 5 days. A delicate operation for it touches intimate, sacred, organs. The sacrament of love.

In the letters exchanged, J. Vanier refers to his intimate union, in prayer and in the flesh, with Brigitte, whose hands, lips and breast cause the “gift of his body”, the gift of the “sacrament of love”, characterized through images, in barely understated words, by erection (“I am giving you my body [...] rising for you, toward you, turning toward you”) and seed emission (“this thirst of love [...] explodes toward you and inside you”). The theorization of natural rapports as a “sacrament of divine love” is very much a Philippian theme¹. The pattern is the same as in the correspondence with Mother Marguerite-Marie and Catarina. We can notice that the basis of it all is a spiritualization of the relationship and the use of many Biblical quotations (excerpts from the Song of Songs, thanksgiving formulas or Marian analogies). In the letters, the sexual relation becomes a “sacrament”². The “bridegroom’s tenderness”, the “bridegroom’s fire”, “the wedding night”, nuptials are equally explicit and clearly expressed. We here are giving two rather long passages – there would be others – to help grasp the nature and scope of those intimate writings.

J. Vanier’s letter to Brigitte, January 8th and 9th, 1992

O “Brigitte”, so loved in Jesus’s heart, I am in Burkina Faso, giving an alliance retreat. Jesus unites me to you so intimately, oh beloved, oh bride, oh yes, you in me and me in you for the glory of the Father, for the Joy of Jesus. I have so few opportunities (out of discretion) to write what is in the heart, this fire burning in the heart, this thirst of your presence, the thirst to love you, to let me be loved by Mary, Mary in you. O “Brigitte”, it is this

1. See for instance T. Philippe, *La vie cachée de Marie*, 1959, 1977, new edition 1988, p. 45 of the 1977 edition.

2. There are many such passages. Beside the two letters reproduced in a frame, see for instance J. Vanier’s letter to Brigitte, January 16th, 1992 : “Keep me there in your heart, your being, so that your heart, your body may be a place of rest, the seat of divine love, a sacrament. I am looking forward to seeing you. I offer myself to you, J.”

prayer that often spurts out, I love you O beloved, I love you, O “Brigitte”, I am handing myself over to you, I am giving myself to you. O come, come beloved bride, come with your tenderness, your hands so soft, your lips. O come beloved, come, give me your breasts that I may drink. O “Brigitte”, everything is so simple, so divine, so crystal clear. All in me is given to Mary in you, all that is most hidden, the sacrament of love that is rising for you, toward you, turning toward you. O dearly beloved, O am I looking forward to meet up with you in [YYY]. My heart is giving thanks ahead of time for this gift, the gift you are, for the gift of your love, the sign of the gift of Mary’s love, for the gift of my love for you, the sign of Jesus’s love for you. O my beloved, I am singing the Song with you, I am singing this 7th chapter: “How beautiful you are, my love”. I am looking forward with such great joy and thanksgiving the gift of your love and the joy to give myself to you, o most beautiful, o hidden bride, o gift from the Holy Spirit, o Mary, I love you.

your tt p. J. [ton tout petit Jean].

Added on January 9th:

O most beloved, your loving presence that wakes up all my heart, my body, has remained with me all day, all night. Yes, you wake up my love. O beloved, in this morning that begins, I am giving myself to you, I am giving myself over to you, with all the bridegroom’s strength and tenderness. O how I love you, my lovely. O icon of Mary, image of the Eternal Father, I am offering myself to you for the work of love, for the work of unity. I love you, your tt p. J. [ton tout petit Jean].

I surrender myself like a little child in her arms, on your breasts, and then, at other times, Jesus gives me his fire. The fire of his love. The fire of the bridegroom. The fire of Trinity. O do pray, my little “Brigitte”. For Jesus to transform me. For all that is “me” (me and my fears, my aggressiveness, me seeking my place, seeking affection) to die so that only Jesus may live. So that I should not be the one living, but Jesus living in me.

Jean Vanier’s letter to “Brigitte”, December 28th, 1995:

O “Brigitte”, today is Wednesday. Each day, each night, you are attracting me. I am so anxious to meet you in order to love you and let myself be loved by you. I am so anxious to find your mouth, your lips, your body, to love you and kiss you all over. O darling, I had to take a sleeping pill last night, but this gives me a headache for the whole day. I shall not take any

pill tonight, but then I risk not to sleep. I beseech Jesus to send you to me to transform my night of anxiety (there is not even electricity) into a night of love, a wedding night. O “Brigitte”, forgive my boldness, but it is as if I cannot withhold this thirst for love any more. It spurts out toward you and inside you. I love you, my move, I love you, O beloved “Brigitte”.

Your tt p. J. [ton tout petit Jean].

The historian is thus brought to enter the privacy of letters and, so to speak, go past the veil. He is no judge – it is important to say it again – and must only fulfill the task assigned to him, which is, through the material gathered, to establish the facts and the relationships as exactly as possible within the limits of his discipline. The fact is that, for Marguerite-Marie as well as for Brigitte, what we have here are relationships between adults, admittedly more or less enlightened, but consenting, which consequently does not raise any problem from a judicial point of view. As far as letter-writing goes, some readers might find that J. Vanier’s letters, the letters of someone madly in love and spirited, are not without beauty, emotional charge or a form of sincerity that, in these times of modern love, sometimes seems to be becoming the new criterion of “truth”. It is naturally quite a different sort of things if we consider common morality, so to speak, or theology. Another J. Vanier emerges, with his part of expressed anxiety, his obscurities, his eccentric and zany spirituality (is there any other word to qualify it?), his fatigues and sexual appetites, etc. Right within his very desires of spiritual elevation, we can perceive, over time, his infidelity to persons, his desire of “faithfulness to Love”¹ as well as his anti-intellectualism and contradictions.

1. On this point see J. Vanier’s letter to Marguerite-Marie, quoted above: “Let us above all remain very, very faithful to Love”.

CHAPTER 7.
**Men and women
in sectarian dynamics**

Antoine Mourgès

T. Philippe and J. Vanier have so far been at the forefront of the historical narrative. This is what the task assigned to the Study Commission demanded. Still, their action and their outreach developed themselves in a mostly female environment. The masculine-feminine relationship is one of the crucial points in their system of beliefs. The place of women, the relations between men and women, the question of feminine sociabilities must be scrutinized with special attention, because L'Eau vive and the group presiding over the foundation of L'Arche would never have been able to function materially speaking without the commitment of those women, dedicated and benevolent, in the full etymological sense of the word, some of whom are very wealthy.

The presentation of J. Vanier's private exchanges with some correspondents (chap. 6) gives an idea of the essential part some of them play from L'Eau vive till L'Arche. It is this part that we must explore further in this chapter, asking ourselves what role is assigned to women, on the modes of continuation of the mystico-sexual practices after the 1956 sanctions despite the disbandment of the group and eventually on the continuation and transformation of those sociabilities at the moment when they lead to founding L'Arche.

Questions of morals in a student hall

There existed a great freedom between the young men and women, which Fr Thomas sometimes fostered and generally tolerated, till the day when there was a scandal with a seminarist.¹

Myriam Tannhof's statement indicates how liberal T. Philippe was concerning this aspect of mixing at L'Eau vive. The Holy Office investigation ascertained the implication of five convents of women in his mystico-sexual practices. There were intense circulations between those monasteries and L'Eau vive: young women in discernment of their religious vocation while residing in the student hall, others reversely leaving their cloister to join them. The role of some of those women residents at L'Eau vive towards J. Vanier was referred to several times in the previous chapters. The stake here is to focus on the group that those "initiate" form at L'Eau vive and on then place they occupy near T. Philippe and then J. Vanier.

MIXING AT L'EAU VIVE

Right from the foundation of L'Eau vive, in August 1945, we can observe the central role that women play in its creation and development. Mme de Cossé-Brissace is the President, Marguerite Tournoux the Bursar and Simone Leuret, whose part played in Anne de Rosanbo's abortion we saw earlier, the Secretary. The hall, originally designed as a hostelry for Le Saulchoir, only opens its doors as "Wisdom school" at the end of the Summer of 1946. Do the first women install themselves at that time? If this is the case, it is not in order to study for we know that no woman student is admitted before the Spring of 1947.

In early 1947², the Dominican congregation of Notre-Dame-des-Tourelles has to leave its premises in Sarcelles. T. Philippe seizes the opportunity and succeeds in having them settle in Soisy-sur-Seine, in a house close to L'Eau vive. The vocation of the congregation, between apostolic and contemplative life, with a strong intellectual dimension, enables it to welcome guests, contrary to the La Croix convent. The

1. "Déposition formelle de Myriam Tannhof", January 2-4 1956, ACDF. Nothing is known about the said scandal.

2. See T. Philippe's letter to Fr Avril, February 3rd, 1947, VI Q 2, ADPF.

prioress of the Tourelles congregation thus accepts to take charge of the feminine branch of L'Eau vive, which welcomes religious or lay women students as of May 1947. We do not have any precise indication as to the functioning of this feminine branch, of which we know that it is closed down right after the first statements, at the end of 1951.

But the group of women that are permanent residents at L'Eau vive has nothing to do with this feminine branch. In the two lists of members of the L'Eau vive community that we have, dated April 1st, 1952 and April 1st, 1954, the term used is "female personnel". The first list indicates the functions of each of them. The group consists of 9 persons in 1952 and 8 in 1954. Five of them are identified through the testimonies collected by the Holy Office as being "initiated" or potential accomplices. Those women, of variable age (from their twenties to their fifties) are not married. They are Marguerite Tournoux, who answers the telephone and welcomes visitors, Marise Hueber and Jacqueline d'Hal-luin in charge of the secretariat, Paulette Posez of the cooking and Lucie Denis of the infirmary. But those lists do not include all the "initiate". This is the case of Anne de Rosanbo, who is officially put aside following M. Guérault's testimony in March 1952, but also of Lyriam Tannhof (born Chemla), who only appears in the 1952 list among the "cleaners". In this chapter we shall focus on these seven women, whom J. Vanier introduces this way:

Fr Thomas's ministry was chiefly with the students, with people who were coming to pray and also with those nicknamed the "Holy Women", including Jacqueline, Anne de Rosanbo, Marise [Hueber], seven or eight women altogether, who were there a little at his service, the welcoming service, the administration, etc.¹

He thus defines their role in the functioning of the community as well as in T. Philippe's ministry and "service". The previous itineraries of those women are not all known. We know nothing of Paulette Posez's and little from Myriam Chemla's. The latter's name suggests a Jewish origin and perhaps a conversion. Through Madeline Brunet's testimony, we know that she was at least a novice at the La Croix convent before

1. "Interview de J. Vanier en octobre 1994", APJV.

joining L'Eau vive¹. It is there also that Marise Hueber, a niece of writer Georges Duhamel, gets to know T. Philippe. She spends five years in that convent with the status of “external sister” before leaving it to join L'Eau vive.

We have more information on Marguerite Tournoux, whose role is essential in the functioning of L'Eau vive. She is about fifty in 1952. A founding member of the association, she, like Lucie Denis, has Fr Dehau as spiritual director and both are devoted admirers of the latter's nephew whom they come to support by joining L'Eau vive. From 1926 to 1938, both had been members of a group of Paris students created at the initiative of Fr Dehau, which had taken the name of Petites Sœurs de St Thomas. Among the other girls was the future founder of Petites Sœurs de la Sainte Vierge.

There are at last Anne de Rosanbo and Jacqueline d'Halluin who, owing to the place they occupy in T. Philippe's and J. Vanier's lives, require ampler presentation.

Anne de Rosanbo was born on January 4th, 1921 from Louis Huon Le Peletier de Rosanbo (1887-1947) and Yvonne de Ganay (1897-1992). Through her father she is the descendent of members of the gentry and counts among her ancestors some illustrious names of French history. The historical seat of the family is the castle of Lanvellec (in the Côtes d'Armor). Through her mother she is a direct descendent of the powerful industrial dynasty of the Schneiders of Le Creusot fame. We have no information on her childhood or her education. In the 1950s her family inhabit a fashionable district of Paris.

Anne de Rosanbo has a brief experience of Dominican religious life at the La Croix monastery. We have some information concerning that period of her life, coming from the files of Fr Antonin Motte (o.p.)², who was in charge of supervising the monastery she enters on July 2nd, 1943. She is 22, takes the name of Sister Anne de la Vierge and joins a monastery installing itself at Étioilles. The moment is marked by the insecurity of the war years, combined with the great dynamism impelled by the Mother superior, Cécile Philippe, prioress of the community

1. Madeleine Brunet's testimony, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

2. VI Q 2 “Monastère Etiolles”, ADPF.

between May 1942 and May 1948. Anne de Rosanbo thus enters religious life at the moment when the L'Eau vive project is taking shape and the Philippe family's “lucky star” seems to reach its zenith. The arrival of a young woman from a good family is a source of satisfaction for the prioress, especially since the de Rosanbo family show themselves very generous toward the monastery¹. During the second term of Mother Cécile as prioress, however, Anne de Rosanbo's religious life comes to a sudden end since she leaves the monastery at the end of her temporary vows², giving it 150 000 francs (around 13 000 euros³).

No reason for this departure is noted down in the Dominican archives. What we know of the rest of her itinerary suggests that T. Philippe had a decisive part in it, for she only leaves the monastery to install herself on the estate nextdoor where L'Eau vive is established, probably shortly before the abortion mentioned earlier. Her life from now on is definitely tied with that of the Dominican. We do not exactly know how the two of them first meet, but it is obvious that in the environment where she lives, everything leads to their meeting. He is the confessor and spiritual director of her convent, which fosters the installation of his hold on many nuns, with his sister's complicity.

As to Jacqueline d'Halluin, varied sources help give a general overview of her family and personality. The family background seems ideal: she is the scion of a rich family of Roubaix industrialists and her name is that of one of the oldest aristocratic Flemish families, with a coat of arms, a title, large estates, fine gardens, etc. Her father, Maurice d'Halluin (1888-1964, from Roubaix, marries Louise Virnot, from Lille, in 1919.

They have five children, three girls and two boys. Monique, the eldest sister, born in 1920, marries Jean-Charles de Dianous de La Perrotine, a diplomat assigned to China after the Second World War, then to Norway. In 2003, she published memoirs under the title *Il était*

1. This is at least what the two minutes of the administration accounts given by Mother cécile at the end of her mandates in April 1945 and April 1948. They mention the important gift in cash or in kind made by A. de Rosanbo's family.

2. “Compte-rendu d'administration de la T.R. mère Cécile de Jésus (Cécile Philippe) 1945-8 mai 1948”, VI Q 2, ADPF.

3. According to the INSEE on-line converter, which takes into account the currency depreciation resulting from inflation.

une fois le siècle dernier (The Last Century once upon a time). Her first brother, Antoine, the second child, 1921-2020), was ordained priest for the Châlons diocese. The second one, Claude, born in 1924, married Alexandra von Schele. Agnes, born in 1923, married a Scotsman, George Dickson, from the Dickson of Clockbriggs and Rescobie family. The youngest girl, Jacqueline, was born in 1926.

In the early childhood of all of them, their parents do not seem very present. According to Monique de Dianous¹, the father is much taken by his professional life. According to Jacqueline, he is rather very ill, suffering from diabetes, which forces him to many stays in hospital². In Monique de Dianous's memoirs a whole defunct and somewhat particular world revives: the father is jumping on horseback for a ride while the workers are leaving for the factory; the family employs a gardener, a cook and private tutors, etc. Until teen-age, the children are schooled and socialized at the château, amidst innumerable cousins. The family leave the North in 1932 and settle on an estate not far from Châlons in the Marne *département* until the war, when they move to Neuilly, where "Jacqueline, little Jacqueline, was following her studies in a chic environment, at the Neuilly Dominican ladies' school³.

In 2006, Jacqueline d'Halluin recorded memories of her childhood and youth. Her narrative is to be taken with precaution as far as facts go, for she is 80 by then. It is dotted with numerous lapses, suggests psychological disorganisation at times, with delusional elements and consequently raises more interrogations than it brings definite answers. It is not an interview properly speaking, since she does not answer questions, but seemingly lets her memories flow. Her memory, however, seems rather solid, focused around a few crucial points, specifically around a symbolic mental "box", in which, according to her, she has stashed away all her important memories since childhood.

She begins by remembering her parents' absence in her early childhood, her schooling at home, numerous cousins and the kind of family tribe that surrounds her first years. She insists that she had no privacy,

1. Monique de Dianous, *Il était une fois le siècle dernier*, 2003, p. 20, p. 87.

2. Autobiographical recording of J. d'Halluin, 2006, AAT.

3. *Op. cit.*, 2003, p. 169.

that she did not grow in "a state of confidence". She has a very strong attachment to nature: she calls up the memory of boars that she would watch in the park; she loved birds and had a few of them in a cage; she says she loved a fir-tree that she considered her "fiancé", at the foot of which she would bury her dead birds. A storm one day uprooted "her" fir and she was quite upset. About 18, she gets an award from *Le Figaro* for a poem in which she poses as the "sister" of "poor misshapen trees"¹. This poem, whose literary qualities a national broadsheet recognizes reveals in her "an outcry towards the poor". For her, "the poor misshapen trees" become a prefiguration of the handicapped residents of L'Arche. The poem also evidences great sensitivity and a finesse in its writing that can be found again in her correspondence with J. Vanier.

What with religious awe, surges of piety and apparition hallucinations, her position is complex spiritually speaking. At the age of 80 she still remembers with awe the priest that was teaching her catechism. That priest, a veteran of the First World War "with a trepanation", was gruff. The catechism lessons were "hard to bear". She takes her first communion aged 7, which seems to have left her with a trauma. Shortly before mass, she went to the kitchen and swallowed a grain of salt. Her stomach, she says, was no longer empty. She takes communion despite what she calls her "sacrilege". She from then on considers herself "excommunicated", without being able to talk with anyone about it, neither her parents, nor the priest who, she fears, might kill her. At 80, she still refers to this as "a very heavy weight to carry about".

She also tells that the Child Jesus appeared to her in a "dream of reality": "Jesus is two and a half or three years old", he is moving forward "on the fireback" of her bedroom fireplace; Jesus is transparent, blessing, loving; his apparition prevents her from going back to sleep. She seems prone to hallucinations. "I was elated, dazzled". "I was in my heaven, my heart was truly being touched."

Some time around 1946, she leaves her parent's home to go and live in Paris, in a little room not far from Parc Monceau. She studies nursing at the request of her mother. She then enlists at Académie Julian to

1. Poem : "Les Pauvres Bougres des forêts", quoted by Antoinette Maurice, *Cette Richesse sui vient du Pauvre*, 2007, p. 38-39.

study drawing and engraving. Around the age of twenty, she will have a new spiritual experience, she says while drawing Zacchaeus in his tree, she is seized by the presence of Jesus. A presence that is “positive, enlightening, a bit to the right”, she asserts. Jesus’s apparition is “an evidence” to her. The next day she goes to the nearest church; she says she needed to “rejoice” in the streets of Paris and felt like “kissing everybody”.

From an emotional point of view, her 2006 testimony is contradictory: she first says that she wants to get married so that she should not be expected to take care of her parents as the youngest daughter is wont to; she also refers to a singles’ club in Châlons-sur-Marne that she frequents in the immediate post-war years: “unmarried friends, among whom friendship would prevail”. But numerous weddings eventually take place among the members of this club and she leaves it because, she says, she wants friends but no husband.

Whether at the family, spiritual or emotional level, the 2006 testimony consequently reveals a form of suffering and frailty, or even psychosis, with bouts of illness, a first communion lived as a sacrilege, terror from the priest, an odd relationship to nature to say the least and hallucinations. Allowing for age and illness, the recorded testimony is also a self-composition, with an insistence on spiritual experience and on what is likely to be perceived as a form of anticipation of L’Arche.

It is through a German student that Jacqueline d’Halluin arrives at L’Eau vive in 1949. She is struck by the magnificent trees in the park and by “Fr Thomas”, a distant cousin by marriage. She settles there in July 1949. She “solicits Providence” and then accepts to replace T. Philippe’s secretary, who has resigned, even though she admits that she cannot type. So it is her who, not without difficulty, types T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier in 1950, when the latter is seeking his vocation. Years later she remembers not understanding at the time why that naval officer wanted to leave “his ship and his birds” and come to Soisy... She welcomes him at L’Eau vive when he arrives in September 1950. Concerning T. Philippe, she interestingly remarks:

I liked Fr Thomas very much, but I felt good. I had nothing to tell him. When he spoke it was as if my cells were settling back into place. [...] We were on the same range. He had his own truth. I joined him in mine. He was changing my scale of values. I did not understand his language. I translated it into another. It was doing me much good.¹

The phrasing is ambiguous, even if the result seems happy: “I felt good”, “it was doing me much good”. Jacqueline d’Halluin is no philosopher, neither is she versed into theology. She hardly understands T. Philippe’s “language”. The entente between the two owes nothing to intelligence or theology. What is this “other range” that she refers to? Is it a spiritual range? is it of a different order? It is impossible to answer this question on the basis of her sole evidence. But we saw that other sources permit to know that, like with other young women at L’Eau vive, what is at play is of an emotional and sexual order.

FROM SPIRITUAL TRAINING TO SEXUAL INITIATION

Out of the five principal testimonies collected during the Holy Office investigation, four permit to establish that T. Philippe drew quite a number of the young women presented above into mystico-sexual relationships, not counting others whose commitment with L’Eau vive did not last as long. Those testimonies, quoted on several occasions, come from Madeleine Guérout, Madeleine Brunet and Norbert and Myriam Tannhof. The first one only remains a year and a half in the community and only occupies a secondary position in the group of initiated women, which she comes close to enough to perceive the way it functions. The second one was a novice at the La Croix monastery before joining L’Eau vive, where she gets married. As to the Tannhof couple, they were already presented in chapter 2. Those testimonies from victims of T. Philippe allow us to see how this nucleus of permanent helpers and some female students toppled into those mystico-sexual practices. With its great precision Madeleine Guérout’s statement offers a good introduction:

A Dominican nun from the Épiphanie was furtively coming up to Fr T.’s bedroom on the first floor, using the small service staircase and Fr T. was climbing by the main staircase. They would lock themselves up for hours

1. Autobiographical recording of J. d’Halluin, 2006, AAT.

on end. The curtains were completely drawn and sometimes the shutters were closed too. This could be seen from the outside when one was passing along in the street. The same mysteries were repeated for Jacqueline d'Halluin, Anne de Rosanbo, Myriam Tannoff [...], Marie-Christine Boullard (a novice from Bouvines, staying at L'Eau vive for a rest). Only those persons were allowed into Fr. T's room. I personally never set foot in it. Nobody had the right, even for the most urgent reasons, to ever even knock at that door. When Fr T. was entrenched there, only Mlle Tournoux, who knew who he was with, since she had announced his visit by telephone, or Anne, would reach him by telephone. And in many cases he did not even answer and Mlle T. would say with a smile to the people who insisted or were getting impatient: "Come back in an hour or two, or perhaps more. As you can see, he is not in his room, he does not answer". And she knew he was there and who he was with (but not always, for Anne had her own keys to enter the room) and after a few hours, Fr T. would come down again, his partner would use the small staircase and reappear, and the curtains would be open again. I saw Anne come down all disheveled, with her skirt unbuttoned and her stockings down¹".

The passage describes a well-oiled organization, hiding fr Philippe's thrysts with young lay women or nuns from the view of the rest of the community or the visitors. T. Philippe meets those he counsels spiritually in his bedroom or, like in the case of Madeleine Guérout, in the girls' rooms. Marguerite Tournoux appears as the guardian of those thrysts, without it being possible for us to know if she did take part in them. She however confesses her complicity to Fr Ducatillon during the interview in which he announces her the result of T. Philippe's canonical trial in 1956:

As I was asking her if, knowing all those things, she had ever thought that they might be reprehensible, she answered no: "If I had thought they were, I would never have stayed". I asked her why she did not find them wrong, she answered: "because I thought that the fruit vouchsafed the tree: the fruit was in her and all around her with the good that she saw was being done by Fr Thomas"².

The facts are confirmed by the statement of Madeleine Brunet, who, concerning Anne de Rosanbo and Myriam Tannhof, adds:

1. Madeleine Guérout's statement, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

2. Fr Ducatillon's letter to Fr Paul Philippe, June 18th, 1956, III O 59, ADPF.

As regards Anne de Rosanbo, I am positive, her case was prior to mine [that is to say before July 1947]. She incidentally always slept at L'Eau vive, even when she was a nun. When those things happened to me, she was overjoyed and said I could tell Myriam, who had received the same graces as me¹.

The passage reveals a form of collective awareness of those "graces". The women in the group talk among themselves about them; the oldest encourage the youngest to carry on. This is how Myriam Tannhof describes this group dynamics in her statement of January 1956:

We thought we were confirmed in grace. We could no longer sin in the domain of purity thanks to a special choice of the Most Holy Virgin, who had revealed the secret of her own life and of her intimacy with Our Lord to us. With the Fr and among us we were already living what we shall live in the heavenly city: carnal union will be central in the heavenly city, in place of the Cross. We did believe in the end of the world.²

The use of "we" and the reference to particular beliefs once more evidence the sectarian dimension. The inner structuration of the group must be underlined: the only man, perceived as a prolongation of Christ, is at the centre. Around him are women, whose position in the "hierarchy" depends on the intensity of their relation to him. Myriam Chemla seems to have occupied first place for a while. But in his statement to Paul Philippe on November 14th, 1955, Guérard des Lauriers indicates that she was replaced as "first favourite" by Anne de Rosanbo in 1948³. In his *votum* of March 1977, Paul Philippe reports that the other women used to call her "the queen" or "the bride". This first role is what wins her an early removal from L'Eau vive, following Madeleine Guérout's statement. A letter sent by the latter to Fr Ducatillon in March 1952 reveals that she was removed from the community earlier on in the year under pressure from Mgr Journet⁴. Her departure is apparently final since Anne de Rosanbo's name does not appear in any of the two lists mentioned above. We however know that she is still punctually coming back discreetly. It is also perhaps in order to remain at a prudent but not

1. Madeleine Brunet's statement, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

2. "Déposition formelle de Myriam Tannhof", January 2-4 1956, ACDF.

3. "Rapport d'archives. Le cas du Rév. P. T. Philippe, O.P.", December 2021, ACDF, p. 10.

4. M. Guérout's letter to Fr Ducatillon, March 15th, 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

too far distance from the community that she settles in a little villa in Villebon-sur-Seine (28 km away), which she calls “Loc Maria” (Mary’s place in Breton) and which, together with her Paris flats, will become one of the meeting places of the “tout-petits” (little ones) until the foundation of L’Arche.

We have less information on Marise Hueber’s and Paulette Posez’s implication among the initiated women. What we know at least is that the first one is considered an accomplice of T. Philippe’s and that she is one of the women removed from the community in 1956. We shall see that, in the letters she sends to J. Vanier, she uses the characteristic language of the group.

As to Paulette Posez, Madeleine Guérout indicates in her statement:

Paulette Posez openly talked to me (a year ago) about “the extraordinary tangible graces of bridal intimacy with Our Lord, through the bodily presence of Fr T. that she had lived”, and with such conviction that there was no enlightening her; but she no longer had this kind of rapports when I entered the house¹.

The young woman would thus no longer have had any sexual relationships with T. Philippe in September 1950. We know that she leaves L’Eau vive in 1953 and spends two years in the close-by Cénacle community of Tigery, before entering the Certosa di Motta Grossa Charterhouse in Pignerolo, near Torino.

We finally know that the Épiphanie community, in charge of the female students of L’Eau vive, is also implicated in T. Philippe’s sexual practices. We saw that Madeline Guérout mentions that one of the nuns there came to visit him in his room at night. Besides, the “Archive Report” of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith indicates that the prioress of the Tourelles congregation has recognized to have let herself be drawn for a short while into his mystico-sexual practices²

It is in this context that J. Vanier’s initiation by Jacqueline d’Halluin takes place in June 1952, which leads us to probe the question of how he inserts himself into that feminine circle.

1. M. Guérout’s testimony, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

2. “Rapport d’archives. Le cas du Rév. P. T. Philippe, O.P.”, December 2021, ACDF, p. 16.

In J. Vanier’s “official” biographies, the Women of L’Eau vive are not mentioned. He alone seems to lead the community and to cross the 1956-1964 period all by himself. The name of Jacqueline d’Halluin only appears on the occasions of his arrival at L’Eau vive and the foundation of L’Arche. In more confidential narratives, such as his interview with Xavier le Pichon in 1994 and the text on the prehistory of L’Arche in 2003, he on the contrary stresses that after 1952 he is “helped by Marguerite Tournoux, Marise Hueber, Jacqueline d’Halluin and others”¹.

With at least one of them, his relation develops into a mystico-sexual relation. We also saw that, in a letter in 1952, T. Philippe advises him to remain prudent with Jacqueline d’Halluin and Anne de Rosambo and not to do anything more than “praying on his heart”. Rapidly, however, as of 1952, T. Philippe assigns his disciple the “divine” mission to represent him at L’Eau vive, especially in the role of protector of the “initiate”. He thus becomes the masculine reference of the group, substituting for the master in the latter’s absence. The group of women do not seem capable of imagining to exist or to last without a dominant masculine element. Does J. Vanier start having mystico-sexual relationships with others than Jacqueline d’Halluin by that time? The point is difficult to ascertain. A letter that Paulette Posez sends him in 1953 suggests a high degree of intimacy. The young woman is referring to the vocational choice she is to make under M.-D. Philippe’s direction. The way she expresses her questioning to J. Vanier is redolent of mystic delirium and reveals the importance she grants to the one she calls “Brother Jean”:

It seems to me that Mary is happy that I write to you, for she does know that it is Big Brother again that must give a last piece of advice for the Little Sister to give herself away to her as She desires.

But this is more obvious further down, when she compares her relationships with M.-D. Philippe to those she has with her previous spiritual director (we suppose this is T. Philippe) and with him:

With Fr M.-D. I do not feel this very strong union, this communion – with more reality – as I did with my former Director, but I believe as you say in his sanctity it is sufficient for me – like with you – there were all those

1. J. Vanier, “Sur la préhistoire de l’Arche”, 2003, APJV.

graces and his secrets of Mary that were uniting us tightly when Mary spoke – With Fr M.-D., Mary never mentioned secrets and I strongly feel that this purely spiritual union cannot exist since She did not choose – this is probably why She loves me to write to you today.¹

J. Vanier thus appears as an intimate reference. We understand that for her he is associated with the kind of union one reaches in those “graces”. Let us however remark that he is a “brother” for her and not a “father” as T. Philippe probably is. This is the same type of connection he has with several other women of L’Eau vive in the period between the moment the community is closed down and L’Arche is founded.

After L’Eau vive: dispersion and union (1956-1964)

Three extracts from documents enable us to grasp the itinerary of the group of the initiate after they were ousted from L’Eau vive in June 1956. The first comes from a letter J. Vanier sends his parents on June 29th, 1956:

A small point we forget too, is that God cannot stick us together unless we are somewhat in pieces, and those he wants for greater strength in the Church have to be in pieces, in order that clearly tangibly, immediately and actually it is He that sticks him together. Never be alarmed or dismayed when you see religious suffering or in trial, and never examine the causes or motives or intentions on the immediate plane. Every detail has passed through the beloved Hands of God for His eternal purpose and eternal glory.²

The second extract is taken from J. Vanier’s text on “the prehistory of L’Arche”:

I must say that throughout that long wait I was being sustained by my union with Jacqueline d’Halluin and Anne de Rosanbo. We were forming a small spiritual community. We saw one another from time to time. Our point of union was our union with Fr Thomas and our absolute trust in him.³

While the first passage is the first occurrence of a sort of “mystics of separation and dispersion” that will become a major theme in the exchanges among the members of the group, the second introduces us to

1. Paulette Posez’s letter to J. Vanier, 1953, APJV.

2. J. Vanier’s letter to G. et P. Vanier, June 29th, 1956, APJV.

3. J. Vanier, “Sur la préhistoire de l’Arche”, 2003, APJV.

the theme of the “mystics of union”, which is the indissociable counterpart of the previous one. The private life of the group seems to be structured by this alternating between periods of separation and union, the two enabling them to find a balance of sorts, according to what they say. Let us also remark that what welds the “little ones” (“tout-petits”) together in adversity is their blind faith in their “imprisoned” master. The third extract, older, is from Madeleine Guérout’s statement in June 1952:

I forgot to say that he recommended, when those things [the sexual practices] could not materially take place because of bodily absence, to do them spiritually, through desire, and this way prepare oneself for the next time, like for something very holy, a sacrament¹.

This sentence seems to provide an essential key to understand many obscure passages of letters in which T. Philippe insists on the necessity to “live again” those graces in solitude to better understand their scope.

THE NUCLEUS OF THE “LITTLE ONES” (“TOUT-PETITS”)

The ousting of the “initiate” from L’Eau vive in 1956 scatters the group away. In the following years, only the quartet of T. Philippe, J. Vanier, Jacqueline d’Halluin and Anne de Rosanbo seem to properly make up a group. It is only from 1959 on that frequent links with other women, former residents of L’Eau vive, seem to be renewed.

We saw how mobile J. Vanier was over that period (Bellefontaine, Crulai, Paris, Switzerland, Canada, Rome, Fatima). It enables him to keep in touch with members of his close circle scattered here and there and especially with Jacqueline d’Halluin and Anne de Rosanbo. As far as facts go, the archives are missing for us to learn about the two women’s activities between 1956 and 1964 with the same precision. The correspondence between J. Vanier and Jacqueline d’Halluin includes 90 letters dated from the years 1954-1962, that with Anne de Rosanbo 35 between 1952 and 1969. In both cases the bulk of them was written between 1959 and 1961.

Those exchanges permit to grasp part of the two women’s lives. Materially speaking, both live on money from their rich families, to whom they devoted a (modest) part of their time. Jacqueline d’Halluin

1. M. Guérout’s testimony, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

is often with her parents in their Paris or Menton flats, or on the family estate in Vétheuil. She has been given the ownership of several flats in Paris and Menton. She occupies one on Rue Duranton and lives on the rents from the others.

Anne de Rosanbo similarly moves about between the various properties of her family. Apart from the immense castle of Rosanbo, which seems to serve mostly as a “second home”, she organizes her life between several addresses, her mother’s avenue Montaigne, a flat on Villa Chanez, a private cul-de-sac in the 16th *arrondissement* and the Loc Maria villa in Villebon-sur-Yvette, which seems to be her principal home. Jacqueline d’Halluin regularly comes to stay there and J. Vanier comes to meet them whenever he is staying in Paris. Anne de Rosanbo appears as the bursar of the group by punctually helping one or the other of them.

As to religion, Jacqueline d’Halluin and Anne de Rosanbo are pious and devout Catholics: they run to Eucharistic Adorations and vespers, confess themselves regularly, sign up for retreats, try to obtain plenary indulgences and papal blessings. Like J. Vanier (and often with him), they multiply Marian pilgrimages, to Lourdes, La Salette or Fatima.

Jacqueline d’Halluin’s letters also devote much space to health problems, both physiological or psychological. After her departure from L’Eau vive in 1956, life is sometimes difficult for “Little Pa.”; she finds herself alone in a complex world. Reading her, we get the impression of a lively, intelligent, but often off-beat woman. She often compares herself to a “pussy”, a penned-in “sheep”, a “little sheep of Jesus”, a squirrel, “Jesus’s squirrel. She also definitely has a sense of detachment, a rather “unleashed” humour:

If you get bored, you may come to rue Duranton. You risk to catch a ‘flu but you won’t get bored. We laugh about everything, make fun of everything, this afternoon I gave birth to a little Jesus (Mary permitting), or rather I laid him. Well, I’ll explain how I did it when you come¹.

She develops a “childhood spirit” or even a “spirit of childishness”, as she phrases it, with scribbled drawings in the margins, collages, cats all over the pages, transfers, etc. Jacqueline d’Halluin’s and Anne de

1. J. d’Halluin’s letter to J. Vanier, end 1957-early 1958, APJV.

Rosanbo’s letters also reveal that their relationships with J. Vanier are not at the same level. Many elements suggest a love relationship between Jacqueline d’Halluin and J. Vanier, seemingly hampered by the logic of the group’s mystico-sexual beliefs.

A certain amount of information can be drawn from those letters. Some of them evidence Jacqueline d’Halluin’s intimate knowledge of J. Vanier’s personality. A shrewd woman, she also lectures him amiably. This is shown by a long letter on humility, in which she invites him to be less in search of virtue so as to better find it:

You must be careful with this search of yours to hit on the first opportunity you have to take a forced plunge into humility... You will scare it away by chasing it this way... This is such a humble virtue. If you mean to catch it, it will hide for sure... When it sees itself sought after so hard, it flees... one must respect its virtue¹.

In other letters, courtly love is surfacing: they love and kiss each other chastely, in pious badinage. One sometimes gets the impression one is reading an exchange between delicate young lovers: “I am greeting you with a ‘saintly kiss’”², “I am kissing you quite divinely”³. J. Vanier sometimes sends flowers or parcels. She sometimes includes “hair” in her letters, “for you to spread through your room for the pleasure to ‘find’ them”⁴. Tenderness exudes: “Good-bye, b. c. p. m. d. m. c. [bien cher petit minou de mon cœur = all dear little pussicat of my heart], I kiss you hard and as many times as the raindrops on Menton today (many, many...)”⁵. The correspondence is also explicitly sexual at times and often implicitly so. “Pa” sometimes regrets that they do not live like together. One perceives something like a wedded desire only indirectly expressed in a signature: “your little missus”⁶, through a wish or a regret: “I do so wish we could live here [in Menton] once together! It would be so good! Unfortunately my parents are often around⁷...”, or in a poetic,

1. J. d’Halluin’s letter to J. Vanier, January 8th, 1957, APJV.

2. J. d’Halluin’s letter to J. Vanier, 1958, APJV

3. J. d’Halluin’s letter to J. Vanier, undated, APJV.

4. J. d’Halluin’s letter to J. Vanier, 1956-1963 period, APJV.

5. J. d’Halluin’s letter to J. Vanier, 1956-1963 period, APJV.

6. J. d’Halluin’s letter to J. Vanier, Wednesday 25th, 1956-1963 period, APJV.

7. J. d’Halluin’s letter to J. Vanier, Wednesday 25th, 1956-1963 period, APJV

picturesque mode: “Time seems so long without you. I wonder why I am here and you not. Tis not normal for two little wood pussicats¹.”

Theirs is definitely carnal love. Jacqueline d’Halluin refers to the nights spent together, the love beds and the drawn curtains. One often remarks an absence of transition between the evocation of their intimacy and that of prayer, which evidences the kind of *continuum* between the two acts in the minds of the two protagonists. A good illustration of those aspects is to be found in the following passage of an undated letter, written between 1959 and 1964:

10 p.m. I am adding a little more intimate note for my little pussy [the previous part of the letter could be read by “Mam Pi.”]. During orison, tonight, I was thinking: “What a pity that he is not here! I feel that I would have loved, loved you, with many very amusing games... I do not know if this will last. You should come back quick, quick, to take advantage of it! For it will perhaps be over when you come back; you know your little pussy, don’t you? Anyway, we’ll do it all as the Good Lord wishes...”

You know that in the silence of your little ‘Casa Columba’ the little birdie may come any moment to enjoy spiritually with its beloved p.f. [petit frère = little brother]. I know that you have a bed in each room so that it might be more convenient for love and curtains behind the windows to stop the daylight filtering through the shutters. The Good Lord makes me play a lot with His games of love with you, but I believe it better to be faraway, I am more faithful to his b.p. [bon plaisir = pleasure] in silence. I hear what He wants better, but I nevertheless would wish you to be here from time to time for a little visit².

Being less numerous, Anne de Rosanbo’s letters do not allow to draw the same precise picture of her relationship with J. Vanier. The language she uses is characteristic of the common and exclusive form of expression that the “tout-petits” employ among themselves. Like Jacqueline d’Halluin, Anne de Rosanbo uses the word “minous” (pussicats) to refer to herself and J. Vanier. Their relation nevertheless appears less impassioned than with Jacqueline d’Halluin. Beyond natural affinities, this may be explained by the slight age gap (16 years) between J. Vanier and her, but also by the longer length of her relation to

1. J. d’Halluin’s letter to J. Vanier, 1956-1963 period, APJV.

2. J. d’Halluin’s letter to J. Vanier, 1956-1963 period, APJV.

T. Philippe, which gives her an almost maternal role. She actually often signs her letters with the nickname of “Mam Pi.” (Mother Pi.). Despite this apparent distance, however, several elements show that the intimacy between them is of another order.

They have agreed among themselves to limit the written expressions of proximity and affection. She thus writes in a letter of June 19th, 1959 (with abbreviations): “I’m giving you lots of sml kisses [mimimiaow]. Bt I think you’d better tear down the letter. May Mary and little Jesus guard and bless you and may They alws more sanctify the litl pussy family¹.” A week later, she writes: “I am really happy that you splash yourself with holy water often. This is very good. May Mary guard and surround you and St Je. too. Next time I’ll try to use ‘vous’ so that you might not alws have to throw away all my letters crammed with ‘tus’. Pi²”. A month later, she insists on her progress: “Y see, I’m getting better at writing to y³!”

Anne de Rosanbo’s written expression in her letters to J. Vanier is thus restrained and we are bound to think that what intimacy is evidenced is not an exact reflection of their relation. They spend long moments together, just the two of them. In February 1959, while Jean is recovering from a bout of hepatitis in Törbel, Switzerland, she joins him and spends almost a month with him. That same year, she stays a long time alone with him in Fatima between May 27th and June 19th. And then there are some phrases that escape her in her letters:

Pussicat mine, I’ll write again tomorrow. I hope everything goes well. On Tuesday evening at last (the 21st), I’ll organize myself to bet at v. cha. [Villa Chanez] to take advantage of a pt. min. [petit minou = little puss] all hot with spiritual things as soon as he arrives [J. Vanier is coming back from Rome, where he has seen T. Philippe]⁴.

SEPARATIONS AND REUNIONS

During those eight years, the quartet adopt a very specific frame of mind and sociability. J. Vanier’s letters to his parents reveal the frame of mind with which he, and probably the rest of the group, are living through

1. A. de Rosanbo’s letter to J. Vanier, June 19th, 1959, APJV.

2. A. de Rosanbo’s letter to J. Vanier, June 26th, 1959, APJV.

3. A. de Rosanbo’s letter to J. Vanier, July 10th, 1959, APJV.

4. A. de Rosanbo’s letter to J. Vanier, February 16th, 1961, APJV.

the period. In reaction to the measures taken in June 1956, the expression of his spirituality is transformed as is his relation to the Church and the world. The first remarkable element, encompassing all the others, is the widened hyper-spiritualization characteristic of the group.

With J. Vanier, this can be first observed in the expression of the suffering that those measures cause him. It is present in the shape of a kind of spiritual dolorism which he associates with the graces of peace and joy that God would grant in compensation. In his first letter after the “catastrophe”, he thus writes on June 12th, 1956:

You can imagine how painful all this is, but Jesus and Mary give me an inner peace and a tranquility stronger than ever. The pain is being changed into joy, like the water into wine at Cana. The Sacred Heart makes me give thanks¹.

As letters follow letters, he goes further and presents his sufferings as the condition, the price of a mystic exchange that produces greater graces and in the future will result in the triumph of those remaining faithful to T. Philippe. A fortnight later, this inspires the passage that we have quoted about the necessary separation of those that want to serve God. The fragmentation of the group, but also of each of its members and the resulting pain become the proof of the divine election of “those that He intends for a greater strength of the Church”. This fragmentation, amounting to a break into pieces, would only be a phase enabling God to piece them together for a new and better work.

To understand the exact sense of this, we must remind that this enhancing of pain as a value rests on the central tenet of Christian faith: the redemptive value of Christ’s sacrifice, to which one must associate oneself to complete it, in the prolongation of St Paul’s writings². It is therefore not exceptional for J. Vanier and the “tout-petits” to make use of it. But the risk is great here to drift toward a form of denial of the real causes of the pain and a rejection of “the world” and of those who caused that pain. Is this the case for J. Vanier, T. Philippe and the “tout-petits”? This is what a certain number of passages written by

1. J. Vanier’s letter to G. and P. Vanier, June 12th, 1956, APJV.

2. See here the famous passage from Colossians (1, 24): “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up what is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake, which is the Church”.

them, echoing a defiance of canon law, a rejection of the world and a sectarian closing-in upon themselves, seem to indicate.

We have already seen examples of this in the letters in which T. Philippe was trying to deter the Vaniers from applying to other clerics concerning their son’s future or when he was drawing the list of those “who do not understand” (Frs Avril, Paul Philippe, de Menasce, Ducatillon) and are preventing John XXIII from “being enlightened by the Good Lord”. We also find examples in J. Vanier’s letters, such as in 1956:

When the human ambitions disappear, the divine ambitions became greater. The road that leads to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary must necessary be paved with these little purifications. So as that we may say [is all] sincerity and veracity. «Only you, my Lord – We have tasted all that is not you – even the joys of apostolate – the joy of doing charity and even good – we have even tasted heaven’s graces – the joys of truth in theology – but none of this is You and You have now freed us from everything for Your sake. Even if you free me from tending in a humanly efficient manner to Priesthood – which is not you – so that our hearts might entirely rest in you without any hope that is not immediately founded on Your omnipotence and Mercy¹.

Because it is henceforth inaccessible, all that gave J. Vanier pride and social recognition is discredited. Being “free”, he now only has one vocation: mystic union. All the things rejected are more or less the expression of the Church as an institution: its relevance is thus reduced and somehow separated from the mystic Church, whose invisible reality prevails. To put it in everyday terms, this attitude is equivalent to the policy of the scorched earth.

We saw above that J. Vanier, Jacqueline d’Halluin and Anne de Rosambo would meet up regularly, two or three at a time, in their various places of abode, in Paris, Fatima or Switzerland. But according to J. Vanier’s own words, what welds them together are the moments they can spend, two or three at a time again, with T. Philippe. Since the Holy Office has strictly forbidden the latter to see the “initiate” or J. Vanier, those meetings are secret. They generally take place in Rome or in Bouvines when T. Philippe comes back to his parents’ for the Summer. It is difficult to give an exact total of those meetings, which occur five

1. J. Vanier’s letter to G. and P. Vanier, Summer 1956, APJV.

or six times a year. While T. Philippe is staying at the Frattochie Trappe (1956-1959), they are harder to organize and take the form of fugitive encounters in the fields around the Trappe. A letter however proves that at least once during that period, T. Philippe considers organizing a meeting in a hotel outside the Trappe. J. Vanier and the two “petites” (girls) are to participate. T. Philippe advises them about the choice of a hotel close to the Trappe, from which he intends to “sneak out”. That hotel must be “large enough for there to be enough comings and goings so that people entering or leavings should not attract too much attention”. To camouflage himself, he asks J. Vanier to prepare him “overalls, such as what mechanics or motor-bikers wear”, but “big enough to be possibly worn over the cassock” and “a leather balaclava, like the ones they [bikers] sometimes wear to protect themselves from the wind.” As to the “petites”, he recommends that they should “rest the best they can to be all at Jesus’s disposal and specifics:

It should be arranged that Jer.’s room be as near the petites’ rooms as possible. – N. could be a brother or a cousin of Jer.’s coming to visit him. – If N. enters the hotel and leaves with Jer. alone, it is possible, I think, that nobody will notice that he will have gone to the petite’s room. In any case, they would go together¹.

There is no way, of course, to know if this fantastic script was put into practice... In May 1959, a series of letters from Anne de Rosambo and Jacqueline d’Halluin to J. Vanier gives a second example of the far-fetched arrangements made by the group. At the beginning of May, Jacqueline d’Halluin leaves alone for Fatima where she meets up with J. Vanier. Then she leaves alone for Rome, where she meets Anne de Rosambo toward mid-May. There, they secretly meet T. Philippe several times. Then Jacqueline d’Halluin goes back to Paris while Anne de Rosambo leaves for Fatima to spend ten days or so with J. Vanier.

From July 1959 on, meetings are more frequent, for the fact that T. Philippe has moved to Santa-Sabina allows him more liberty. He now may go about in Rome for a few hours a day. The “tout-petits” take advantage of that situation and from the Summer of 1960 on, J. Vanier

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, January-February 1958, APJV.

rents a flat in Rome. This flat is described in a letter as a “refuge”, which “appears as a much + (more) saintly place than a convent, a true home of Nazareth, a true house of pleasure¹.” The group assiduously frequent the place for longer and longer stays until the Summer of 1963 (between 1961 and 1963, J. Vanier spends several weeks every year in it).

What exactly is going on during those meetings? Some elements of answers can be drawn from the correspondence between T. Philippe and J. Vanier. Here is a first example from a letter of 1957, in which T. Philippe asks J. Vanier for a kind of debriefing of the latest encounter:

Do tell me, on occasion, in a short note, if the latest session was a source of grace for you, espec. after perhaps. It is the aftereffects, which are not given immtdly, on the very moment, which oft. are the best signs of God’s pleasure. I feel that They require from us the utmost docility and faithfulness to those pleasures which sometimes at the moment abv. all remains [sic] for us acts of faith and confidence².

T. Philippe asks here J. Vanier to attentively scrutinize the “effects” of their prayer together. The question regularly comes back in his letters. We perceive here the will to see the authenticity of those “extraordinary graces” lived together vouchsafed. We may remark the ambiguity of the term “pleasure”, which harks back to divine will but also charges with sensuality. This passage renews the hypothesis, impossible to decide, of the existence of a possible homosexual relationship between T. Philippe and J. Vanier. It at least refers to the practice of prayer on the other’s bosom, implying a non-sexual contact between the two men. The point provides a good example of the difficulty of interpreting those passages.

A second extract dating from early 1958 allows to precise the spiritual meaning given to those encounters. What is referred to here is no longer an *a posteriori* report but the preparation of a session:

I pray a lot for this little session to be the source of much grace fr. all. The Good Lord made me prepare it since Pi.’s last visit. He makes me pray a lot, especially for you, for it seems that the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit want to take advantage of these coming days to even more tighten

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, Summer 1960, APJV.

2. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, 1957, APJV.

the links between their tt. petits, to make them become aware even more divinely of their so exceptional love for them and of this so mysterious vocation for which They chose them. I feel that this meeting mst. really be like a retreat with the Holy Spirit, in which each of them remains very hrd. in recollection, like in the Upper Room to be very attentive to all that It may want to indicate. They will perhaps want more prayer of the tt. petits together than last time, one mst. humbly ask thm. to well specify all their pleasures of love, to give light, [meekness?], strength, faith and confidence and abv. all love, so as to do all They want¹.

T. Philippe insists here on the exceptional character of the “tout-petits” spiritual experience. It seems clear that he is referring to the mystico-sexual “graces” binding the group together. Let us also note the recommendation of a form of passivity. The “tout-petits” will have to wait in silence for the expression of “all their pleasures of love” by the persons of the Trinity. It is hard to represent to oneself the way those indications may be given, all the more so since the protagonists will have to “listen” if “They” want “more prayer together”. The point seems to be raising questions. It possibly is a reminder of the time of sexualized collective “prayers”, which we know to have existed at the beginnings of L’Eau vive through Guérard des Lauriers’ testimony to the Holy Office².

A last excerpt dating from the Spring of 1960 and already partly quoted in the introduction is even more explicit about the carnal dimension of those meetings:

Just a note to let you know that last Thursday’s meet has left a v. deep memory, [esp.] the + [more] intimate moments. They very [often] made it revive in the o., a if [to complete] and plunge even deeper into love (into the peace of the o.), which is what had been started. This is + and + what They want when We are together gestures that must be revived together in the o. afterwards, and through this They want to unite or come + and + divinely. I felt it so strongly with Did. Among brother and friends supernaturally united there always remains sectors of the ego that are not purified

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, first half of 1958, APJV.

2. The CDF’s Archive Report quotes his statement this way p. 10: “There were first meetings of several girls together [...]: they were naked, and Fr T. Philippe too. What was being performed was all that Christian marriage forbids” The author of the report adds: “This lasted about six months. Some of the girls were embarrassed. So they were only individual encounters afterwards”.

by love (i.e. that are not [illegible]), that remain a bit hardened by the ego, where graces of union are necessary to enable one to become aware of it... And I so strongly feel that those gestures and those words, which are the [inst.] and the signs of this life of union establish quite a [diff.] type of union between us, mch + divine than so far between us... Like [divinely] between 2 brothers in Jesus, 2 brothers [two words illegible] and for [illegible] the love of Jesus hmsf, Jesus wans them to know and love each other with [His very Bridegroom’s love] ... It is indeed the way Jesus wants to make us understand that He no longer sees us as in [the, illegible word, 3 letters followed by a dot] orig. where harmony between grace and nature would have prevailed, where Love would have used nature for divine purposes bt. [not] in a way [proportional] to nature... Jesus, through his hidden life, through his sacrifice, is still mch + free to already give us, right down here, joys from heaven, where the distinction between sexes, in its complementary function towards the purposes of nature, has no more *raison d’être*... It only serves for the divine frolicks of love¹.

At the end of the day, the sexual aspect explicitly emerges at rare moments only. But we can ascertain that all that is written obviously strays away from the norms of Christian spirituality and prayer: essential graces reserved for a small group of chosen ones, the necessity of collective intimacy in prayer, the disappearance of the ego and of personal identity to the benefit of total passivity in order to receive the Spirit’s “instructions”.

If they are occasions for the group to meet and reinforce its cohesion, those meet-ups also partake of the “mystics of separation” that one finds in the letters of T. Philippe, who probably inspires it. This is also noticeable in the relation between Jacqueline d’Halluin and Jean Vanier, which is close to a love relationship. At least, this is the desire that one can perceive in her letters. But to no success, for the mystico-sexual relationships of the “tout-petits” are not exclusive. They must aim at “killing the self” and suppressing any selfish tendency. The love exchanged must not be for the well-being of one or two persons but that of Christ and Mary revived in others. The relationship is not of the order of marital, exclusive love. It is thought of as “supernatural” by essence and therefore implying celibacy and a multiplicity of partners. But this does not prevent Jacqueline d’Halluin from expressing her love pain in that situation:

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, Spring 1960, APJV.

It is true to say: the more one loves, the more one suffers. But is it my fault if Mary has given me so many s. [spouses]? One's heart is entirely given to each of them and suffers for each as if he were the only one [...]. How can the earth be salted but with our tears? Is it not the only salt we have!¹

AFTER 1959 : EFFICIENT AND PRUDENT PROSELYTISM

The year 1959 seems to mark the start of an expansion of the group. T. Philippe's greater liberty at Santa-Sabina perhaps galvanizes the quartet's energies to renew links with former participants from the time of L'Eau vive and "initiate" new persons. In some letters of the period, this is the new sense that Jacqueline d'Halluin's role as "mistress of the novices" seems to be taking along T. Philippe's doctrinal lines:

Whenever I have a little free time, I hasten to meet Jesus as soon as possible, so that I can throw Alex spiritual food in a jumble. He might fill my heart (X) with things to say to Alex and I very much need this contact with him for the speech to be efficient... [...] I throw Alex spiritual food in a jumble. I can go very far. She really is gifted for spiritual things... We speak of everything: the creation of man and angels, predestination, human love, incarnation, active and contemplative life, divine life, etc. and all of N.'s conversations and texts organize themselves in my mind and are very useful, especially for her, at the moment. [...] She so much needs to be surrounded with prayer. For the time, she is my spiritual baby... She was saying last night that she is my disciple, but I place her into Jesus's and John's arms².

"Alex" has not been identified, but the reference to her evidences the existence of such prudent proselytism animating the group. At the same time, we can see that links have been renewed with Harry McDonald and his sister Gerry. What information we have comes from Donna Maronde (Varnau), their first cousin's daughter with whom the Commission had a written exchange³, on the one hand, and, on the other, from the "NFA" correspondence, in which they are abundantly

1. J. d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, 1956-1963 period, APJV.

2. J. d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, 1959 or 1960, APJV.

3. Donna Maronde-Varnau (marital name) knew the Trosly-Breuil community through her cousin and spends about two years there between 1973 and 1975. She leaves the community after repelling a sexual assault by T. Philippe. Her statement will be presented in part 4.

mentioned as of the Summer of 1959¹. Thanks to Donna Maronde's statement, we know that Gerry and Harry MacDonald are Americans from La Grange, Illinois, and are part of a group of three children that have grown up in a fervent Catholic environment. Harry is present on the list of members of L'Eau vive in February 1954 and we know that he stays there till 1956 and after that follows his studies at Le Saulchoir until 1957 at least². His cousin reports that he considered his years at L'Eau vive as the best in his life. According to J. Vanier's testimony³, his sister is by then an air hostess for Pan Am, had visited her brother several times and had made a first contact with the group.

Brother and sister appear in the correspondence from the Summer of 1959 onwards. They are referred to as "little Ger." and "Har." or as to "the 2 young Amer." The first of their stays mentioned takes place in Fatima, in the house where J. Vanier has just arrived and it lasts at least two weeks⁴. They are introduced to T. Philippe in Rome a year later, in September 1960, then spend a few weeks again with J. Vanier in Fatima⁵. In May and June 1961, they are with J. Vanier in Fatima⁶ and then nearly spend two months near T. Philippe in Rome, where they are staying in the flat rented by J. Vanier⁷. Then two letters from T. Philippe⁸ from the second half of 1963 show that by the time he returns to France, Gerry is at Loc Maria and that he plans to meet her in one of Jacqueline d'Halluin's Paris flats.

The letters reveal that T. Philippe and J. Vanier are very soon at work toward an "initiation" of Gerry and perhaps of her brother. The question seems to be posed as early as the Spring of 1960. While they are in Fatima with J. Vanier, T. Philippe writes him: "I think Harry and his sister must be much much prayed for to see a bit how you can prepare them... to see me

1. The "NFA" file includes 4 letters from Gerry McDonald to J. Vanier.

2. J. Vanier's letter to G. et P. Vanier, February 5th, 1957, APJV.

3. Entretien de recherche, A. Mourges, 2009.

4. A. de Rosanbo's letter to J. Vanier, July 6th, 1959 ; J. Vanier's letter to his parents, July 28th, 1959, APJV.

5. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, October 1960, APJV.

6. A. de Rosanbo's letter to J. Vanier, May 29th, 1961 and J. d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, June 5th 1961, APJV

7. T. Philippe's letters to J. Vanier, July-August 1961, APJV.

8. T. Philippe's letters to J. Vanier, August-November 1963, APJV.

in a solitary place¹.” It is then decided that they will come in September with J. Vanier. A letter dated from the following October shows that they have come to Rome but that the encounter did not take place as expected:

I wonder if y. mst come bk with the 2 litt. Amer. around Nov. 9th. As fr. me it seems btr to remain with them in Fat. now and to come alone before the arrival of the ttes petites, with a return to Paris and then Canada... I have a feeling that little Gerry's calling to get to Rome is not so strong and so certain any more. I do not know what it means. Has she received what the Good Lord intended to give her for the time being and so is it better to wait? Or did she consciously or unconsciously through a resistance [3 words illegible] to God's appeals and offers, I do not know. [...] if there were new things between you and little Ger. and she, as for her, felt the desire or the wish to see me, fr one reason or another, especially since the Good Lord wishes to give her His love more warmly than she had received it the 1st time, it would be ttly. different².

But it seems that this “resistance” was defeated for as of the Summer 1961 the only question is about the “union” with Gerry, who is coming to install herself with her brother in Rome for a few weeks in July and August. T. Philippe then regularly gives their news to J. Vanier. At the end of July, he writes:

I remain very united with you. The presence of the little Amer., whom I see 3 times a week, is here to make this union even more actual. I think they are both well, lit. G. seems all given to Jesus and her little brother seems to profit well too...³

The McDonalds thus seem to progressively enter the intimacy of the group and become integrated in the practices uniting its members. A letter written after they have left Rome indicates how strong this integration is:

I am often living anew our latest encounter, our quite fervent prayer between the 3 of us with you and little Gr. On occasion, tell her how united with her I remain. Especially in that mystery. I shall write to her soon bt I feel that the Good Lord abv. all wants me to be strongly and permanently joined to her in the silence of orison, in [all fiery] orisons⁴.

1. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, May 1960, APJV.

2. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, October 1960, APJV.

3. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, end July 1961, APJV.

4. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, October 1961, APJV.

A letter from Jacqueline d'Halluin to J. Vanier seems to indicate that she also has lived a “quite fiery prayer” with Gerry: “I have received a good little note from Gerry which did me so much good... Reminding me of all the graces in the little upstairs room at L. M. [Loc Maria] in her very simple language¹

The ties renewed next are with Marise Hueber. We see that from the Spring of 1959 at the latest, she is hired as a helper to T. Philippe's parents in Bouvines. This is where the five letters she addresses to J. Vanier between 1959 and 1961 are sent from. Here again their content evidences the intimacy between the two of them and her impregnation into the culture of the ‘initiate’. In a letter of May 20th 1959, she tells of her joy to have been chosen to “serve the Father's parents”².

A little later she tells about her wish to meet J. Vanier the next time he comes to France and says she will make arrangements to be available for “Mary above all loves me to manage to foster reunions”. In a last letter written on April 6th, 1961, she expresses her desire to meet J. Vanier again:

Jesus has very strongly united me to you, especially on holy days and since Easter. The latest graces, for which I am so thankful to you, have mch transformed me into you, Jesus teaches me to live + and + in the instant of this total gift of the heart in its most intimate. It is my life, my inner strength in the instant that Jesus should be here very present – or imply in my faith in his love. I am sometimes waking up at night with urgent desires, burning of the possession of your even + intimate, [illegible word]. The graces lived together have put great confidence in my heart, it still seems to me that it is your confidence that you have given me + [plus] the fact that you took me strongly as divine bridegroom. And Jesus above all placed deep insight in my heart for me to detect the demon's tricks to deprive me of that confidence: those embarrassments, those fears, those worries, those sorrows that stem from sensitivity and humanity³.

The passage once more fits in perfectly with the beliefs of the “tout-petits”. The words used here remind of some of Jacqueline d'Halluin's letters.

We must eventually mention Jeanne Riandey, who joins the fray at the end of the period although she had known the group since 1956. Her itinerary is described in the book of Michèle-France Pesneau, who calls

1. J. d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, und. Monday October 30th, 1961, APJV.

2. Marise Hueber's letter to J. Vanier, May 20th, 1959, APJV

3. M. Hueber's letter to J. Vanier, June-July 1959, APJV.

her “Anne”¹. Her narrative is confirmed and completed by a letter sent by Jeanne Riandey’s mother to Fr Dicatillon in 1956:

From what she told Michèle-Anne Pesneau, Jeanne was born from an ill-assorted couple of non-believers, who divorced when she was a late teenager; Partly left to her own devices, she multiplies sentimental adventures. In 1954 she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a little girl that her father does not recognize. She then tries to have a more stable life and does some stitching work to make ends meet. This is how her mother tells about the following of her story in her letter of 1956:

For a little over three years, my daughter, Jeanne Riandey, 33, had been living with me. [...] About six months ago, my daughter, wishing to become Catholic, followed a few courses at the Institute of rue de Vaugirard and, through M. Daujat, came into contact with Fr Philippe, attached to the Le Saulchoir convent. Right from their first encounter, the latter held prodigious sway over my daughter, as she herself told, attributing it, among other reasons, to a similitude of visions. After her christening and first communion, which took place in Étioilles on February 2nd last, my daughter felt such an ardent desire to enter the convent that she told me about it. [...] For the sole reason of the existence of the little girl, this new project was far from being approved of by me.²

In the weeks that follow, Jeanne Riandey leaves her mother, taking her daughter with her. Her plan is to join the Bouvines monastery. Meanwhile, she and her daughter reside at L’Eau vive, where she begins to frequent the circle of the “tout-petits” Marie-Dominique encourages her project to become a nun and advises her to give her daughter for adoption. She follows that procedure and gives up her daughter, whom she will never see again. In Bouvines, things do not go well. Fragilised by the fact of abandoning her daughter and by the departure of Cécile Philippe in June 1956, she leaves the community.

In between, her mother has died and she inherits her flat in Paris. Owing to the links she has kept with former residents of L’Eau vive, she is solicited to punctually aid Marise Hueber as helper to T. Philippe’s mother. This is where she first meets him, by the end of the Summer of 1963. She told about that first encounter to Michèle-France Oesneau:

1. *Op. cit.* p. 147-155.

2. Marcelle Baton’s letter to Fr Ducattillon, May 8th, 1956, ADPF.

She then tells me that it all started at the house of old Mrs Philippe, on the occasion of Fr Thomas’s famous visit, probably in the summer of 1953. As she had asked to meet him, she is shown by him into his bedroom, where he immediately takes her into the bed. He will later take the habit of regularly visiting her at her place in Paris. She then welcomes him for lunch. [...] There would then follow a session of “mystic graces”. Anne then tells me: “I saw Fr Thomas do everything – I mean EVERYTHING”¹.

With this situation, we can observe that, on the eve of the foundation of L’Arche, the group of the “tout-petits” has found a certain dynamism again and has managed, against the will of Rome, to secretly keep extremely strong ties, continuing its mystico-sexual practices, going so far as to even initiate new participants who had closely or remotely gravitated around L’Eau vive previously.

Towards the foundation of L’Arche

We do not mean to study the foundation of L’Arche² here, but to assess the exact part of the “tout-petits” in it. As far as historical method goes, it is important to underline a form of depletion of the sources at our disposal to know the life of the sectarian group between 1963 and 1964. The reduced geographical distance and the growing liberty of movement make writing letters less necessary and we are also reaching the chronological bottom of the “NFA” file, which strongly diminishes after 1963. From that moment on, the evolution of the relational dynamics between the “tout-petits” therefore partly escapes analysis for lack of archive sources.

AUGUST-NOVEMBER 1963

T. Philippe’s return to France in July 1963 immediately enables the “initiate” to envisage to get together again shortly. The foundation of L’Arche – the name is decided upon in May 1964 – is primarily the result of this wish to get together. There are few traces in the correspondences of the way the members of the group perceive the event. But the “liberation” of T. Philippe opens for them the perspective of the happier

1. *Op. cit.* p. 151-152.

2. On this point, see part 3.

days that they have been hoping for since 1956. The most faithful have suspended their lives, to safeguard the liberty to meet T. Philippe again when he was freed. The latter announces his superiors' decision to J. Vanier in a letter of July 1963:

I shall take the holiday month that is again granted to me this year in August. I think I shall be leaving R. on the 30th or 31st. What happens next is unknown. I shall not go back to Rome but will be given over to the authority of the Provincial of France to be assigned to a convent. This is not official yet, for the Fr Gen. had not yet received the rescript, but it is for sure... The Fr Gen. does not know in what circumstances I shall then be for my Mother and for the rest¹.

The news is important, but we can see that, if the principle is decided, “what comes after is unknown”. This return is accompanied by many uncertainties for, owing to his situation, T. Philippe will not be totally free to choose his future. What then opens itself for him is a phase of delicate negotiation, which implies to keep his relationships with the “tout-petits” hidden. There cannot be any question of ostensibly reuniting the group around him. His letters to J. Vanier and the ones he exchanges with his Dominican superiors over the next few months show that at least two projects are considered for him. All in vain. The first project is mentioned in the letter of July 1963 previously quoted: he would join an international centre of the Rosary, led by a Dominican and located in Saint-Maximin. The second is evoked in an exchange of letters between Fr Kopf, the Provincial of France of the Dominicans, and Fr Omez, the superior of the Mossul convent: T. Philippe would be sent to Iraq, to teach at the Mossul seminary. While praising T. Philippe's theological qualities, Fr Kopf actually does not hide his wish to prevent his return to France:

It is not to be wished that he should return to France, because the fantastic stories that caused his departure have left traces in the opinion and certain wounds are not healed yet².

The Mossul project in turn falls short at the end and Fr Kopf does not seem to pay attention to T. Philippe's case again before the end of the following October. In between, T. Philippe has elaborated his own

1. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, July 1963, APJV.

2. Fr Kopf's letter to Fr. Omez, August 5th, 1963, III M 815, ADPF.

project. He shares a rather vague first version of it with J. Vanier in the July 1963 letter already quoted:

After much praying, it seems to me that the Good Lord wants me to try and see if, now that I can return to Fr., I could not obtain a little hermitage, i.e. the possibility to lead a life of the same kind as at Annel, saying Mass but without any other ministry, as witness in the way of Fr de Foucauld... in a forsaken [...], in one of the poorest deserts in France... perhaps in the Yonne, or in the Oise... or in the South¹...

No more than Fr Kopf does he imagine taking back an active role in his original province. The important point here is the reference to the situation he lived for two years in the institution headed by Dr Préaut at Longueil-Annel. Since he stayed there this psychiatrist has remained a faithful supporter for him and J. Vanier. We have also seen that Dr Préaut has put a room in Paris at J. Vanier's disposal since 1956. We lastly saw that he has kept up a correspondence with T. Philippe and has been authorized since 1959 to visit him in Rome on several occasions². The relationships between T. Philippe; J. Vanier and him have never ceased since L'Eau vive closed down. He is the one who will provide T. Philippe with a solution in keeping with his wishes and those of the group around him.

For lack of sources, we do not know how this project came about, but we can notice that it imposed itself quickly. In a letter from T. Philippe to Fr Kopf of November 11th, 1963, we learn that they have just met and that the Provincial has agreed on principle to an installation in the vicinity of Longueil-Annel³. An exchange of letters with Dr Préaut enables us to learn that the Provincial is coming to see him on December 19 next to examine the technicalities of this installation⁴. A letter of December 27th sent by T. Philippe to Fr Kopf lets us know that he arrived on December 24th and visited the hall of residence of Val-Fleury, whose

1. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, July 1963, APJV.

2. Dr. Préaut's name appears 42 times in T. Philippe's letters to J. Vanier. His visits to Rome are mentioned in the letters of April-May 1959 and October-December 1961, APJV.

3. T. Philippe's letter to Fr Kopf, October 20th, 1963, III M 815, ADPF.

4. Dr. Préaut's letter to Fr Kopf on December 10th, 1963 with the latter's answer on December 12th, 1963, III M 815, ADPF.

“unofficial chaplain” he becomes, before going to visit the vicars of Longueil-Annel and Trosly-Breuil to introduce himself and inform them of his role at Val-Fleury. This home was founded in 1960 by M. Prat, a friend of Dr Préaut’s, who wished to create a small institution in which his son, handicapped, could be welcomed. The following letters sent by the Provincial to T. Philippe are addressed to him at Trosly-Breuil.

During that lapse of time of five months when T. Philippe is negotiating his future position, we know that he and his “tout-petits” meet regularly in Bouvines or Paris... The five letters that T. Philippe sends J. Vanier during that time evidence the continuation of their secret meetings. The “tout-petits” first come to meet him in Bouvines, in the house of T. Philippe’s mother. He warns J. Vanier of the dates when it will be impossible for the latter to come owing to the presence of visitors and once more imagines stratagems to have the “little girls” come during his mother’s absence. We have a good instance of this with this letter of November 1963:

If you intend to come with tte. petite Pa., it would be better to come from Wednesday evening 6th till Wednesday morning... 8th... this way you could arrive during lunchtime on the Wednesday, but this is perhaps much of a rush... even in the afternoon about 3 or 4 I think my mother would be very happy if you could drive her to [Messines¹?], and drng. that time little Pa. could enter the house (little Pa remaining in the car before Bouvines, like with Marg., and she could walk up to the house at a time agreed between the two of you... But it is perhaps the evening that is the most convenient, and on the Thursday afternoon, you might drive my mother to [Messines?], and drng. that time littler Pa would be all quiet and could and could well enjoy the b. [bridegroom] again. Bt abv. all we mst. avoid precipitation and cmpltly. do Jesus p. [pleasure], as I say in my latest letter. If Pa and you feel nothing, see nothing, it is perhaps better not to move and to find ourselves again in the silence and solitude of orison and if the Holy Spirit and Jesus give you a violent desire to come, a real thirst, you may come².

1. The word is hard to decypher. There exists a city of that name in Belgium, 45 km from Cysoing. Hence the proposition of Messines.

2. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, early November 1963, APJV.

A last extract, taken from a letter of December 5th, 1963 shows that the whole of the group are in favour of the installation at Trosly-Breuil and that even before the project of L’Arche is elaborated:

It has warmed my heart since last night and esp. this morning to have placed into your hands the future outside installation of Trosly and to remain all inside in prayer, in orison, together with you and all my petits, to beseech Jesus and the Holy Spirit, with Mary and Joseph, to complete everything according to their pleasure. I am sure that on occasion, through direct or telephone conversations, find, next to little Pi. and Pa., good little advisers full of practical sense and nous... This will also tighten links with the Préauts... [...] You know how intimately united with you I remain and especially these days because of the little trip to Abbeville (on Tuesday) and the union with Mother Mad. in the Trosly foundation and the preparation of your course at Toronto. In very deep union. Tell little Gerry that I am keeping her very deeply¹.

T. Philippe’s installation at Trosly-Breuil thus appears here as a catalyst for the gathering of the group. All support the project and invests themselves into it, J. Vanier, “Pi and Pa”, the Préauts, with whom “the links must be tightened” and even T. Philippe’s cousin, Marie-Madeleine Wamberghé, the Carmelite removed in 1951. We saw that she was one of the nuns who had had mystico-sexual relationships with T. Philippe at the Nogent Carmel, from which she had been removed and sent to the Abbeville Carmel. We can also, in this correspondence, notice what seems to be the first mention of a wider project referred to as “the Trosly foundation”.

THE FOUNDATION OF L’ARCHE: 1964

During the first months of 1964, J. Vanier is hired to teach, as we know, at St Michael’s College, Toronto. The last letters sent him by T. Philippe date from that period. They show that his absence is temporary and that the project to found a new home in Trosly-Breuil is well on its way.

The home of L’Arche opens on August 5th, 1964, as Raphaël Simi and Philippe Seux are welcomed, together with a third person who will be taken back to hospital the next morning. The foundation quickly

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, December 5th, 1963, APJV.

mobilizes people outside the L'Eau vive network. Those are first Canadian friends of J. Vanier's, whose names are highlighted in the narratives of the foundation, such as Jean-Louis Coïc, present in the first few weeks, or Louis Pretty, an architect present in the first few months, but also people coming from the Canadian networks, such as Mira Ziaudin, an Indian who had studied in Canada for a few months and remains at Trosly for a few years. Local people or people from the surrounding villages are then mentioned, such as Christiane Edde and Antoinette Maurice, both social workers in Compiègne, the second of whom will become the first deputy director of L'Arche.

The progressive depletion of the "NFA" correspondence from 1964 onward does not allow to retrace the installation of the members of the group in detail, over the years 1964 and 1965. We can however observe their important role thanks to the oral or written narratives left by some witnesses of the period, such as the one of Antoinette Maurice, entitled *Cette richesse qui vient du pauvre. Les débuts de L'Arche vécus et racontés par Antoinette Maurice* (The riches coming from the poor. The beginnings of L'Arche as lived and told by Antoinette Maurice) and given out to all the members of L'Arche in 2007.

Being close to T. Philippe, Antoinette Maurice grants much space in her narrative to the latter's story and to the prehistory of L'Arche. She thus introduces Fr Dehau, then the history of L'Eau vive, the praises of which she sings. Either friendly or spiritual, her links with the former women residents of L'Eau vive transpire in her writings. Her testimony, matched with others¹, allows to get an overview of the presence of the "tout-petits" at L'Arche in its first years and to make out two types of such a presence: the women who had an active role at L'Arche and those who joined primarily to be in contact again with T. Ohilippe and the L'Eau vive group.

Among the second, we find Marguerite Tournoux and Lucie Denis who, without officially joining L'Arche, keep strong links with quite a few of its members. There is also Anne de Rosanbo, who buys a house on the rue d'Orléans that becomes a "new Loc Maria", at a stone's throw from La Ferme, the spiritual centre founded by T. Philippe in

1. The passage is mostly based on interviews n° 23, 25, 63 and 86.

1972. On her house and her daily life, this is the testimony of Agnès Humeau, in charge of La Ferme from 1984 to 1995:

She would spend the whole summer there [in Trosly-Breuil and winters in her Menton flat. Year in, year out, she would arrive in April or May. We did not see much of her, she was very independent, she had a charwoman and a gardener who grew fine flowers that we could pick from to decorate the chapel. [...] She rarely came to La Ferme, would occasionally have a meal there, especially on a feast day but not regularly, she came to Mass and to attend Fr Thomas's retreats. [...] She had no implication in L'Arche, apart from being very close to the founders; it was difficult for she was away 6 months a year and did not know much about handicapped people...

As to her personality, her spiritual sensitivity and her personal links with T. Philippe, J. Vabier or Jacqueline d'Halluin, Agnès Humeau adds:

She had a strong personality and would occasionally butt heads with Jacqueline, even if they were very close and unwavering friends. But she was of a rather sanguine temperament, would smile easily, talked a lot while at the table, which sometimes irritated Jacqueline. Her religious sensitivity was that of Fr Thomas and many others, both very conservative and very "mystico-sentimental" with great devotion to the saints. One could feel deep complicity between her, Jacqueline, J. Vanier and Fr Thomas. We had no qualms about it, we just thought that they were long-time friends. But I had noticed that Anne behaved like a little girl when Jean was around, nothing more existed¹.

The passage shows that the special links that had been woven before 1964 remain in the 1980s, both visible by and kept secret from the members of L'Arche who are far from imagining their workings.

We must also point out the financial support afforded to L'Arche by Anne de Rosanbo. The archives of the Trosly-Breuil community and the testimonies of its oldest members reveal a very active policy of building purchase with sometimes sophisticated financial plans². We must suppose that Anne de Rosanbo contributed to them, as well as the Philippe family and the networks of the Vanier family. For instance, the gift of

1. Interview n° 25.

2. See Chapter 10.

property to La Ferme in the 1980s is abundantly documented¹, namely that of a forest that she owns, the sale of which permits to constitute an important capital that she invests and that will generate important revenue until the mid-1990s. Anne de Rosambo's generosity does not stop at this donation: when she dies, on August 2nd 2004, she bequeaths all her goods and chattel (several flats, her house in Trosly-Breuil and plush bank accounts) to La Ferme and several friends and members of L'Arche.

Next come those former members of L'Eau vive who play an active part in the foundation of L'Arche: Marise Hueber, Gerry McDonald, Jeanne Riandey and Jacqueline d'Halluin.

Marise Hueber's stay at L'Arche is rather brief. J. Vanier himself said it in an interview, indicating that, some time after her arrival, she had had a car crash and had subsequently died from her wounds². Gerry McDonald's commitment, longer, lasts from July 1965 till April 1971³ at least and she is one of the figures of reference, whose closeness to J. Vanier many people notice, in the nascent community.

Jeanne Riandey's commitment is more durable. She joins the community on January 1967 at the latest⁴ and quickly takes up important responsibilities as executive in charge of the assistants (as those who accompany handicapped persons are called), which means that she is responsible for a large part of the management of human resources (welcoming, hiring, monitoring, in-house training, departures, etc.). She spends the rest of her life at Trosly-Breuil, until her death in 1996⁵.

But of the "initiate", Jacqueline d'Halluin is the one that plays the

1. What documentation we have on the gift made in the 1980s comes from the personal archives (APJFF) of Jean-François de Frémont (JFF) passed on to Jean de La Selle, who later on gave them for us to consult. J.-F. de Frémont was a member of the Board of Directors of the "Chemins de l'Arche", and association the mission of which was to manage La Ferme.

2. Research interview, A. Mourges, 2009.

3. The dates given here are drawn from "L'histoire des arrivées et départs à l'Arche" compiled by J. de La Selle from the pay slips kept in the archives of the Trosly-Breuil community. It does not take into account benevolent work for the community. Gerry McDonald's association with the nascent project is mentioned in T. Philippe's letters of 1963.

4. For the same reasons as previously, we may suppose that Jeanne Riandey, being close to the group, can have been present at Trosly-Breuil before January 1967.

5. Her situation will be examined again in Part 4.

most important part in the foundation. This was highlighted by J. Vanier. In two later narratives, he points out her role in the choice of name for the new home. In a first text entitled "Notre Histoire", published in the *Lettres de L'Arche* in 1989, he writes:

Shortly after the opening of the home, I asked Jacqueline to look into the Bible for possible names for the home. She proposed about a hundred names. When she said L'Arche, I knew without a hesitation that this was the name that was needed. She knew it too, but it was only later on that I became aware of all the symbolism in that biblical name of Noah's Ark / the Ark of Alliance / the Marian perspective with Mary as the Ark of the New Alliance *per se*. It also is Jacqueline who composed the prayer of L'Arche from a few indications I had given her¹

In Jacqueline d'Halluin's obituary published in September 2009, J. Vanier again points out her contribution while respecting the specific rules of the literary genre. The text is both suggestive and written in retrospect:

She was somebody precious, both to myself and to L'Arche. I had known her since 1950, when I arrived at l'Eau Vive from the Canadian Navy. She by then was Father T. Philippe's secretary. Later she helped me as L'Arche began. The very name of L'Arche was given to us when we were together, at the start of the first home; and it was she who wrote the prayer of L'Arche. She was wonderfully practical, she looked after the renovation out of the decoration of all our homes; a woman of prayer who was so creative in all our celebrations, full of joy and wisdom – the wisdom of love. So many events brought us together, but above all our love for Father Thomas and the many things we lived together, at the heart of L'Arche.²

So Jacqueline d'Halluin is present as early as 1964 next to her dear "Jer." and to "N" in Trosly-Breuil. She is the one who suggests the name L'Arche and composes the "Prayer of L'Arche" in which Mary is prayed to for her to make L'Arche "a refuge for the poor, the petits". She heads the community of La Ferme in Trosly for over twenty years, from its foundation in 1972 until 1984. She creates a crafts workshop

1. J. Vanier, "Notre histoire", *Lettres de l'Arche*, special edition, March-June 1989, n°59-60, p. 5-6. See also similar narratives in J. Vanier, *L'Histoire de l'Arche*, Novalis, 1995, p. 16 and J. Vanier, *Notre vie ensemble*, 2009, p. 18.

2. J. Vanier's round-up letter, September 2009.

and oversees the renovation and redecoration of the other homes. After 1984, she continues to look after T. Philippe, until the time he leaves for Rimont. Those public testimonies and other narratives clearly show that J. Vanier turns to Jacqueline d'Halluin twice to solicit her and give her a role of honour, a memorable part in the foundation process, even if he gives her "indications" to write the prayer and picks out the name of L'Arche with her among a hundred proposals.

To conclude on the point and this chapter, we must make several remarks and raise some questions as to the prolongations at L'Arche of the practices of the group of the "initiate" and their exact place in the institution.

On the first point, we may wonder if the members of the group, the women on the one hand, J. Vanier and T. Philippe on the other, keep up having intimate relationships. The testimonies we have just read evidence a prolonged mutual affection. We also know that the male references of the group, who become those of a whole community and then a federation of communities, initiate a certain number of young women who have joined L'Arche or come close to it as early as the 1970s. The prolongation of those practices at L'Arche will be tackled in the fourth part of this study. But if the two men of the group keep up their practices, one may wonder if this is the case for all the women. We know for instance that Gerry McDonald eventually leaves the community in order to get married. According to Donna Maronde, she perhaps did this after suffering to see herself supplanted in J. Vanier's affection by a newcomer. As to Jeanne Riandey, she told Michèle-France Presneau that she had rather quickly put an end to the sexual dimension of her relation with T. Philippe. The question thus essentially remains open for little "Pi." and "Pa.". One may wonder how they lived their ageing and the initiation of young women by "their two males". We also know that La Ferme was an especially propitious place for T. Philippe to perpetuate his rites. Now Jacqueline d'Halluin was in charge of the place and it is hardly imaginable that she ignored what he was up to there¹.

As to the second point, we must first underline the fact that the part of the women formerly residents of L'Eau vive is almost entirely

omitted in J. Vanier's biographies meant for a general public. Only Jacqueline d'Halluin is sometimes mentioned and it is obviously because J. Vanier mentioned her. Such a silence fits in with a process of dissimulation of the dark past of L'Eau vive to the eyes of the other members of the new community. In the first decades of L'Arche it also corresponds to deliberate discretion so as not to attract the attention of the Roman authorities that had forbidden the creation of a new Eau vive. But this disappearance from official narratives indirectly reveals the place occupied by those women in that secret group. They are numerous and play an essential part.

We must finally stress the point that if L'Arche is not L'Eau vive, it is indeed the new refuge where the "tout-petits" can again live together. The place they occupy in the foundation and the initial development of L'Arche is quite concrete and important. Through the two men that have become founding fathers, the "tout-petits" deeply and durably make their mark on L'Arche. This mark, however, is not that of the sectarian and mystico-sexual practices which, as we shall see, have remained the privilege of a minority within L'Arche. The mark is mostly a spiritual influence, a conception of man and poverty that will be tackled in part 7. It must be pointed out besides that the success of the community dilutes this initial sectarian nucleus into a larger whole. The diversification of the recruitment networks allow for the arrival of persons with varied profiles and communities are founded in Northern America and India in very different contexts from the one of the Trosly community.

1. See chapter 13.

CHAPTER 8:
Jean Vanier, the Carmel and L'Arche

Antoine Mourges

The implication of some Carmelite nuns in T. Philippe's mystico-sexual practices has already been mentioned in the previous chapters¹. It is at the Christ-Roi Carmel in Nogent-sur-Marne that the first occurrences are identified on the occasion of a visit by Fr Marie-Eugène in March 1951. Five years later, a letter from the Holy Office, dated May 28th, 1956, signed by Cardinal Pizzardo, mentions three Carmels on top of L'Eau vive and the Dominican nuns' convent. It specifies:

As concerns the Carmelite convents in which Fr Thomas Philippe exerted a noxious influence, the Most Eminent Fathers [of the Congregation of the Holy Office] have entrusted the M.Rev.Fr Marie-Eugène, o.c.d., assistant general to the Federation of French Carmels, with the execution of their decisions²

The Dominican archives have enabled us to follow the decisions concerning L'Eau vive and the Dominican nuns with precision, but we do not have the same abundance of sources as regards the Carmels. We can however measure how deep T. Philippe's influence was thanks to

1. To write this chapter, we have benefited from the help of Guise-Castelnuovo, Ph D in History, specialist of the history of the Carmel in France in the contemporary period. Her knowledge of the spirituality and of the Carmelite rule has been a great help, especially to analyse the correspondences presented in this chapter. We profusely thank her for her reviewing of our writings and her lights, given u-in the form of a document entitled: "Relecture du chapitre 8. Jean Vanier, le carmel et l'Arche", 4 p., October 24th 2022.

2. Cardinal Pizzardo's official letter to Fr Ducatillon, May 28th, 1956, III O 59, ADPF.

the Dominican archives, those transmitted by the “Fédération Marie-Élisabeth” of the Carmelites of Northern France and lastly by the numerous elements included in the “Archive Report” of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

In the perspective of the Study Commission, several elements invite us to examine the situation of the Carmel attentively. Over three generations at least, the Vanier family have deep relationships with the Carmel. The “NFA” documents reveal the close links that J. Vanier maintains with some Carmelite nuns despite the 1956 condemnations: three out of his eighteen correspondents are Carmelite nuns. A dozen letters have been kept, fifteen if we include the signed photos. Despite their small number, those letters are extremely significant of the amorous passion that J. Vanier arouses and of the sentimental, spiritual and theological confusion that a certain revisiting of the Song of Songs or St Thérèse of Lisieux’s poems is likely to foster: nuns breaching their vows, the senses and common sense disturbed by the fire of love, spiritual perspectives that one is forced to declare contrary to the Carmel tradition and to the Catholic tradition.

Complementary elements enable us to ascertain the many links, spiritual, emotional and economic between the Carmelite order and L’Arche. Those links, as we shall see, are the prolongation of those established since L’Eau vive, especially those with the Abbeville and Cognac Carmels, which actively support the foundations of L’Arche at Ambleteuse and La Merci. J. Vanier and other members of L’Arche regularly go there for friendly visits and retreats, while several assistants enter them after a passage at L’Arche, often in the surroundings of T. Philippe or La Ferme.

The Carmelite sociabilities of the Vanier family

J. Vanier’s links with the Carmel order prolong a family tradition going back to his grandmother on his mother’s side, Thérèse de Salaberry Archer, “Ganna”. Her spiritual director, Fr Almiré Pichon was also that of the Martin family and briefly that of the most illustrious member of that family, Sainte Thérèse of Lisieux. A. Pichon also played a role next to Pauline Vanier who, once married with Georges, multiplied links with Carmelite nuns in England, Canada or France.

THE PERSONAL LINKS OF THE VANIER FAMILY WITH CARMELITE NUNS

Shortly after encountering Thérèse of Lisieux in 1888, Fr Almiré Pichon is sent to Canada, where he remains until 1907. This is where he meets young Thérèse de Salaberry Archer and quickly becomes her spiritual director. She will later one declare herself to be his spiritual daughter¹. From this, she derives a spiritual attitude, insisting on divine mercy and littleness, reminding of that of Thérèse of Lisieux, whose heirs the Vanier family will later declare themselves. It is naturally that, once married with Charles Archer, Thérèse de Salaberry entrusts her daughter Pauline to the Jesuit that will receive her first confession². Through Fr Pichon, the Vanier family opens a new strong link with the Carmelite order and place themselves, so to speak, under the aegis of Sainte Thérèse of Lisieux.

From the 1930s onward, following Georges Vanier’s assignments, the Vaniers establish personal and durable links with some of the nuns that have already been mentioned in chapter 1 of this report.

The first of those relationships seems to be Pauline Vanier’s with Mother Mary de La Croix³, the prioress of the Hitchin Carmel, about forty kilometers north of London. Mary-France Coady’s meticulous work, which abundantly quotes the letters exchanged between Pauline Vanier and that nun, enables us to know the chronology of their relationship with precision and to assess its importance⁴. It was through another Jesuit, Fr Roger Clutton, a member of the Jesuit community of Farm Street in London, that Pauline Vanier gets acquainted with this Carmel in 1938. The Jesuit advises her to go and meet the prioress, Mother Mary de La Croix. Until her death on April 10th, 1952, this nun of Irish origin becomes one of Pauline Vanier’s and indirectly of Georges’s spiritual counsellors.

But this meeting takes place shortly before Georges is posted in France. The relationships with the nun are thus essentially carried on

1. Mary Francis Coady, *Mercy Within Mercy*, *op. cit.*., 2015.

2. On Fr Pichon and his place in the Vanier family, see also Mary Francis Coady, *The hidden way : The Life and Influence of Almiré Pichon*, Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1998.

3. Her birthname is not known. In what follows, we shall mention the birthname when it is known. If it is not, no mention will be made of any name.

4. *Op. cit. digital edition in Kindle format.*

through letters. After Georges is appointed ambassador, the couple install themselves in France until 1954. As we know, this is where the Vaniers get acquainted with T. Philippe in July 1946, after which the latter will become Pauline Vanier's spiritual director towards the end of 1947. This is the subject of the letters that Mother Mary de La Croix sends to Pauline Vanier quoted in chapter 1. It is T. Philippe who introduces her to the Christ-Roi Carmel of Nogent-sur-Marne and to its prioress, Mother Thérèse de Jésus. The latter quickly takes up a place similar to that of Mother Mary de La Croix and progressively enters the privacy of the Vanier family. In the book he devotes to his father, J. Vanier underlines the latter's spiritual debt to that nun:

What influences brought him to that life of orison? Since 1946, when he had become ambassador in Paris, that half-hour of prayer had become a rite for my parents. They had been helped by a Dominican priest and then by a Carmelite nun, a long-time friend of my mother's. My father too liked to correspond with her, for he felt she was very united to God. It was through her and through my mother, who had long been attracted by the spirituality of the Carmel, that he became acquainted with saint Jean de la Croix and saint Theresa of Avila¹.

The nun, whose name is not mentioned but who can easily be recognized, thus contributes to making Georges Vanier enter the Carmelite spirituality and harmonize himself with his wife.

The strength of the links that are quickly established with Mother Thérèse is also explained by the fact that Élisabeth de Miribel, another close friend of the Vanier family, enters the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel. Born in 1915, the latter had joined General de Gaulle in London in 1940, thus attracting the wrath of her family, with whom she renewed relationships only after the war. She had then been a regular visitor of the Vaniers with whom she had tied up strong links. Her commitment to the Free French had also enabled her to make friends with several of its intellectual and Catholic figureheads such as Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, or the Dominican Frs Delos and Couturier. It was the Maritains who, after the war, advised her to visit Le Saulchoir, where she quickly discovered the community close to L'Eau vive; This is where she hears

1. J. Vanier, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

of the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel, where, according to what she tells in her autobiography¹, T. Philippe would store the goods prepared for the L'Eau vive bazaars. She takes part in their organisation together with Pauline Vanier and discovers that Carmel through her. She is also deeply impressed by Mother Thérèse:

This is how I got to know the Christ-Roi Carmelites, or rather their prioress who received me in the visiting room. What she told me when we first met, I do not exactly remember. But those words pierced me through like an arrow of fire².

Following that meeting, she begins following a period of vocational discernment which leads her to enter that Carmel on February 1st, 1949. This reinforces the Vaniers' nascent ties with the prioress and probably plays a part in Pauline's decision to be received as tertiary on the following November 24th. This also explains why J. Vanier, from the moment he settles at L'Eau vive in September 1950, regularly goes there to visit Élisabeth de Miribel, whom he is close to, and Mother Thérèse, whom he quickly ties up with.

THE EPICENTRE: THE NOGENT-SUR-MARNE CARMEL

The ties uniting Georges and Pauline, and then J. Vanier, to the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel are central to the secret geography of the group of women, the "initiate" of T. Philippe, the place where his deviances are first identified. The strength of the personal links that they developed between 1947 and 1950 explains that they will try to help him right from the first sanctions against Mother Thérèse in March 1951. The ACDF "Archive Report" provides ample quotations from the testimonies of the nuns implicated in those deviations and enables us to assess the force of T. Philippe's hold on them.

Mgr Brot's canonical visit in November 1950 was examined in chapter 2. We saw that he was stressing in his report how frequent T. Philippe's presence at the Carmel and how strong his influence were, while the nuns were trying to hide it all from the outside. On the basis of this document, the author of the "Archive Report" gives details about this excessive presence:

1. Elisabeth de Miribel, *La liberté souffre violence*, Paris, Plon, 1981, p. 215-220.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

The Dominican sometimes arrives by night. “Devoted” sisters then prepare him a meal, which he takes in the visiting room in the presence of the prioress. “The Fr sometimes works in the visiting room, until well into the night, with one sister...”, Mgr Brot notes¹.

Another statement from an “initiated” and penitent nun, who had since then become deputy prioress of the same Carmel, is recorded by Paul Philippe on February 19th, 1956. The author of the Report indicates that “this is a true confession, signed by the nun, with numerous crude and sordid details” and quotes a long excerpt from it, from which we here reproduce the passage concerning the other nuns implicated:

R2 was doing the same thing, and so did Mother Thérèse. – And so did, outside Simone Leuret, TR, Anne de Rosambo, Myriam Tannhof. With Mother Thérèse, I was doing the same things as with Fr Thomas. [...] Mother Thérèse told me that Fr Dehau was doing the same with R4, prioress in 1937 and after 1938 at the L3 Carmel that she had gone to found. Fr Thomas [struck out in the text] Mother Thérèse offered herself to Our Lord to continue R4. With Fr Thomas they both offered themselves as victims to continue his work, but knowing that they would be betrayed some day. She would tell me that Fr Thomas often repeated that some day he would be sent to Corbara for penance. Simone Leuret used to say that Fr Thomas was embodying O. L. when made to wear the madmen’s costume. Fr Dehau probably did the same things with Mother Thérèse and during the war he said he was sending Fr Thomas as his beloved son and told Mother Thérèse that she could do everything with Fr Thomas exactly as with him. [...] Even now, R5, R2, R6 talk among themselves and support each other to “keep the spirit” of Fr Thomas².

This testimony suggests that at least six nuns of the Nogent community followed T. Philippe in his mystico-sexual practices and that, at the ever of the conclusion of his trial, three of them persist in “keeping the spirit of it all”. This also one of the rare testimonies enabling us to catch sight that those deviances stem from Fr Dehau’s theology. It shows the place that this Carmel seems to occupy in the Dehau-Philippe “spiritual dynasty” too. In a letter sent to Paul Philippe on March 25th next, the

1. “Rapport d’archives. Le cas du Rév. P. T. Philippe, O.P.”, December 2021, ACDF, p. 5-6.

2. R1’s statement, February 19th, 1956, ACDF.

prioress completes her statement by notably describing the conviction inhabiting Mother Thérèse, some of the nuns and T. Philippe, that the Christ Roi Carmel has a providential and exceptional mission to fulfill:

Mother Thérèse and the other prioress who has remained here did believe and perhaps still do that they had a mission from the Holy Virgin to fulfill in this Carmel, through the graces they called divine. I think it was Fr D. who had told them that. [...] This is why, when Mother Thérèse left in March 51, she had only one idea in mind: to come back here and seek how to do it, for she though it was the Virgin’s will that she should come back, that she was Her instrument and she has never since hidden her desire to come back among us... In one of the letters that Mother Thérèse wrote to me before our present mother’s arrival, that is in 52 or 53, I believe (I unfortunately no longer have this letter, which I sent to Fr. Élisée) she was saying: “You must know that in Nogent, there is a great treasure, something from Our Lord’s heart that was given and that your little brides’ hearts must keep receiving in silence.” I was so struck by this sentence that I know it by heart.¹

The passage pinpoints the special place that this Carmel occupies. It enables to show how the Vaniers’ Carmelite sociabilities cross the path of the group of “the initiate”. But do Pauline and Georges Vanier perceive that secret life behind the spiritual dynamism of Mother Thérèse and her sisters? What is their stance as to the sanctions successively imposed on the latter in 1951 and 1956? Some elements, scattered in the different archives, permit to catch a glimpse of it.

The oldest element is in Mgr Brot’s report of November 1950. The Apostolic Visitor explains that Mother Thérèse explains and defends Fr Philippe’s presence by putting forward that “Madame Vannier [sic], the Ambassador’s wife, addresses the Fr and, to that purpose, is used to coming to the Carmel”. Pauline Vanier and her social position are thus used as an alibi by her Carmelite friend. Is it unbeknownst to her? Nothing enables us to know for sure but we shall see that her attitude and that of her husband lets us believe that they would not have disowned the use of their name. As mentioned in chapter 3 – about their interview with John XXIII in March 1959 – Georges and Pauline Vanier do not seem to have been acquainted with the exact gravity of the

1. R1’s letter to Paul Philippe, March 25th, 1956, ACDF.

charges against T. Philippe and are probably to be counted among those who refused to give credit to what they perceived as defamation. This seems confirmed by T. Philippe himself in a letter of the second half of 1958, in which he worries about a visit that Pauline Vanier is to pay to Mother Thérèse, which might risk to knock down the arguments put forward by J. Vanier to justify his situation:

In the case of Mother Th., it seems to me that a soul that would really feel from the inside that it has erred would lock itself up in a humility that would drive it not to budge anymore, esp. towards somebody (such as your mother) who has been totally kept outside of evthng.¹

This leads us to advance the hypothesis that The Vaniers, ignorant of the grave events at the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel or unable to believe and assess them exactly, chose to remain faithful to the links they have tied with it. For Georges, this faithfulness probably stems from a sense of honour and duty that pushes him to do what he considers just despite oppositions.

This being said, the elements relative to the help brought by the Vaniers to the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel are rare and few. The first is in a letter from Charles Journet to Jacques Maritain of September 19th, 1953. The two men, close to Élisabeth de Miribel too, are worried about her position in the context that we have just described. The nun is beginning to have doubts about her vocation, which she will give up a short time afterwards. Charles Journet, whom some of T. Philippe's victims trust, occasionally visits his friend at the convent to support her. He thus reports to Jacques Maritain:

I was promised – more or less – that the prioress would be changed. But I have the impression – or am I wrong? – that the two prioresses, the former and the new one, are siding with the Vaniers and hoping to remain faithful to Fr Thomas. They are too compromised to really liberate themselves.²

The allusion to the Vaniers does not help assess their exact role, but it indicates that, for Charles Journet, they are associated with the defense of T. Philippe and his influence on this Carmel. As to the two prioresses referred to, whom he finds “too compromised”, his correspondence

1. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, August-December 1958, APJV.

2. C. Journet's letter to J. Maritain, September 19th, 1953, *Correspondances Journet-Maritain*, vol. 4, éditions Saint-Augustin, Saint-Maurice, 2005, p. 298-299.

with Jacques Maritain in previous years enables us to understand that they are those who in turn replaced Mother Thérèse after she left in March 1951. Those successive changes are significant of how serious the crisis that the community is going through is at that moment¹. One will have to wait until 1954 and the arrival of a prioress coming from Caen for the community to begin to recover some balance².

A second extract provides us with a more precise idea of the type of support Georges and Pauline Vanier could bring to that Carmel. This is taken from a long note sent by J. Vanier to an unknown correspondent (perhaps T. Philippe). It is chiefly the account of an interview he has just had with Fr Ducatillon at the beginning of June 1954 or 1955. One of the items in this account is entitled: “Mum and Mother Thérèse”.

Mgr Journet is still very active in his persecution of Mother Thérèse. He also acts on and with Fr d'Elbée³, Superior of the “Picpusses”. Fr d'Elbée has written extremely hard letters to Mother Thérèse. Fr Élysée – though he is longer Provincial, remains in charge of the Carmelites – remains very kind with the Mother. Do you think it will be useful for Fr Élysée to see Fr Ducatillon – Fr Élysée does not agree at all with Fr Journet and even believes that the latter has done wrong. Fr Élysée has (I think) always praised the profound spirituality of Nogent (he did it a year ago anyway). If Fr Ducatillon has heard of Nogent it would perhaps be good for him to have another echo. But on the other hand, Provincials perhaps do not like to talk about their charges among themselves... Mum is to see Fr Élysée next week (on Thursday). She might put in a word if the opportunity turns up⁴.

1. See especially C. Journet's letters to J. Maritain of July 29th 1951 and June 18th j1953, *op. Cit.*.

2. One may think that there were no new elections for the Superior (or Fr Marie-Eugène, the Apostolic Visitor) decided that the context was not favourable. In this case he must have appointed a “vicaress” (several succeed each other here), either among the community or coming from elsewhere; and she remains in charge as long as the Superior judges that normal elections cannot take place. This means that the monastery is placed under supervision.

3. Jean du Cœur de Jésus is the religious name of count Claude d'Elbée (1892-1982), father of the Congregation of the Sacred-Hearts of Jesus and Mary (or Picpucians). In her letter, already quoted of March 25th 1956 to Paul Philippe, the sub-prioress of the Carmel, indicates that Fr d'Elbée has been her confessor for 20 years and that he has quite a few data on the problem [of the Carmel and T. Philippe] “and I think that if you asked him to come and see you, he might give you very precious information.”

4. Note from J. Vanier to an unidentified correspondent, June 1954 or 1955, APJV.

We understand here that the Vaniers' support consists in defending the image of Mother Thérèse and the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel in front of different personalities when they have the opportunity. J. Vanier's stance is here very clear-cut and he uses strong words, referring to "Mother Thérèse's persecution". He will come back on this point in equally strong terms in a 2009 interview: "That woman was crucified; one cannot understand what was going on". He then adds:

I don't understand. I still have some stuff against Fr Marie-Eugène... but I don't get too much into this for he too is meant to be canonized¹.

Eroticism and confusions

As we said, J. Vanier was keeping as dozen letters from three Carmelite nuns. Two of those, Mother Thérèse and Sister Marie-Mardeleine Wambergue, stayed for a while at the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel. Between 1951 and 1956, on orders from Fr Marie-Eugène, the two of them were separated and assigned to other Carmels. The third, Mother Myriam de La Trinité, is a nun from the Cognac Carmel, and becomes its prioress in 1964.

Following the method we have defined, we would like to propose an analysis of this dozen letters, which, properly speaking are extra-ordinary. It is for this reason that J. Vanier kept them to the end. For the same reason, the Commission decided to publish large fragments of them and sometimes give them almost in their entirety.

Those letters evidence very numerous mental confusions, about the persons or the dates. They reveal what must unfortunately be considered a raving Christology, in which J. Vanier becomes both Christ and the bridegroom. Some of them are flaming love letters. The context of enunciation forbids to read them only as prayers or as classical spiritual texts revisited. The enunciation is plain: those are letters sent by women to a man, the most lively of them pass without a transition from the mystic to the erotic; they quote classical texts and, as will be seen, distort them.

The letters indicate numerous and serious breaches of the Carmel rule: private letters sent on the sly, use of "tu" [2nd person singular,

¹.Research interview, A. Mourges, 2009.

reserved to family and close friends], repeated invitations to J. Vanier, phone calls, free use of money, strange apprehensions of long retreats or solitude, enclosure not respected, etc. The nuns no longer live in obedience or respect their vows. They no longer act as Carmelites should nor do they live as their vocation means them to. Did they have sexual relations with J. Vanier? Like for some women referred to in the previous chapters, there is no answering the question definitely. It is however a fact that those letters open onto a more complex pattern than the classical distinction between "male abusers" and "abused women". What we have here are women who, despite their belonging to the Carmel, express desires and emotions that are definitely sexual.

Although the three nuns are scattered all over the national territory – Nogent-sur-Marne, Cognac, Montpellier, Abbeville, etc. – common traits can be observed between those Carmelites: an attachment to T. Philippe's, M.-D. Philippe's and J. Vanier's writings, and the same epistolary mode. The most striking feature is the use of a very specific mode of writing and that of abbreviations common to all. The Cognac nun and the Abbeville nun write to J. Vanier the same way, with the same passion. We can observe the same manner of designation: "m b a", for instance, for "mon bien aimé" [my loved one]. The cause of this is J. Vanier's style itself, which the nuns imitate and prolong. Have his originals been kept? Were they burned down together with the papers of the nuns concerned upon the latter's deaths, according to Carmelite usage? The fact is that, to this day, we do not have them at hand and that we are reduced to proposing the thing as very likely: it is the style of J. Vanier himself that is at the origin of some stylistic traits of Sister Marie-Madeleine's and Mother Myriam's.

MOTHER THÉRÈSE DE JÉSUS

Mother Thérèse de Jésus's links with the Vanier family and her implication in the most serious charges against T. Philippe (cf. chapter 2) have already been studied here. We would like to complete her portrait and bring in some information enabling to better understand her link with T. Philippe and the Vanier family.

The register of the Takings of the Cloth at the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel informs us about her identity and the stages of her itinerary.

Born on July 21st, 1902 in Paris, her name is Renée Kergall and she was baptised at Saint-Honoré d'Eylau's. She takes the habit on May 3rd, 1928, takes her vows on May 9th, 1929. As she has become prioress of the Nogent Carmel, she not only is made to resign her charge but is transferred to leave it on the order of Fr Marie-Eugène on March 14th, 1951. From J. Vanier's letters to his parents' letters, we know that she is first being sent to the Montmartre Carmel, then to Louvain. An act of transfer in the archives of the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel indicates that she has been at the Rouen Carmel since September 1954 when she is transferred to Montpellier in August 1956. She stays there until she is transferred to the Saint-Germain-en-Laye Carmel on August 24th, 1965. She remains there until her death in 1981¹.

Her move to Montpellier follows the conclusion of T. Philippe's trial and is part of the series of decisions made by the Holy Office to try and disperse the group so as to prevent the various nuns from keeping the memory of T. Philippe. In a letter of March 25th, 1956 to Paul Philippe, the deputy-prioress of Nogent indicates that Mother Thérèse's influence still makes it felt on some sisters and that it is to be feared that she might be moved to a Carmel too close to that of Nogent-sur-Marne. A passage from her interview by Paul Philippe on February 17th, 1956 shows that her own views on the events in which she took part remain somewhat ambiguous:

I regret what I did with the Fr and all the wrong I did to those of my daughters who took part in the same things. I was convinced that this is what the M.H. Virgin wanted... But, Father, how do you explain this? It all happened through the M. H. (Most Holy) Virgin's special permission: this is very mysterious. But we cannot judge. This must have been a temporary mental aberration... [...] I burnt all my letters to the Fr and those of the Mother Superior of the other Carmel (non mi ha volute dire il nome ma ho capito

1. Those successive moves also reveal an unusual situation. Carmelite nuns do not change monasteries unless to go and found another or to temporarily assist an understaffed Carmel. In case of a community problem, a nun may occasionally change communities. But she will not change twice: if things go wrong in the second community, she will have to leave for good. Those changes show that, for one thing, Mother Thérèse does not integrate herself to the communities where she is assigned and also that she is not sent away from the Carmel, indicating that the prioresses and superiors have not conformed themselves to usage.

che si trattava di L2) [she did not want to give me the name but I understood she was referring to L2] not to compromise the Fr¹.

After 1956, T. Philippe's letters to J. Vanier and those that the latter sends to his parents reveal that Georges and Pauline Vanier visit her in Montpellier during their yearly stay in Europe. Their son sometimes accompanies them but he also goes alone at times. She remains, in an undefinable way, a very close friend of the family's, since she calls Jean with his nickname within the family circle: "Jock". She is informed of Jean's priestly vocation and of the ordeals of the closing down of L'Eau vive. The correspondence between Mother Thérèse and Jean extends from 1951 to 1956. It reveals Jean's visits to the Montpellier Carmel in September 1959 and July 1960.

J. Vanier had informed T. Philippe of his visit in September 1959. The latter's answer concerning the nun is a bit cryptic. It seems that after largely benefiting from the "graces of union", she is now less open to them and more obedient to the Church on some points:

I shall be very specially with you in Montpellier. I shall pray the Holy Spirit so that you may confidently confirm, in confidence in [...] the love of predilection of Jesus's Heart for the little [bride]... He loved her so much before the painful mysteries... He loves her even more now bt. he would love her to show more confidence in the final resolution never to step back and to let the Holy Spirit quit. freely make her live in o. [orison] all the graces of old, which r. alws. present and this is when the Holy Spirit will make her understand that they are true graces of love. He gave them to us (wn. we were quite poor, quite awkward) bt. to make His love better triumph, bt. He requires [heroical] confidence. And he and He alone will bring back total peace, a plenitude of peace to His tte. petite [bride], she behaving in full confidence [...] like a tiny little child²

In form as well as in content, Mother Thérèse's letters to J. Vanier are very different from those of the two nuns that follow. Written while she was still under strict supervision, those remain "standardized". They nevertheless enable us to catch a glimpse of the persistence of the links among them and of J. Vanier's place in these. We shall only provide one excerpt:

1. Account of the interrogation of Mère Thérèse, former Prioress of the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel, February 17th, 1956, ACDF.

2. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, end of September 1960, APJV.

Letter from Mother Thérèse de Jésus, ocd, to J. Vanier, July 1st, 1956. It is written as the first measures concerning the closing down of L'Eau vive are beginning to be known. The question of J. Vanier's priestly vocation is posed with difficulty, since Cardinal Pizzardo demands that he follow a regular training in a diocesan seminary, without any perspective of coming back to a renewed Eau vive.

July 1st, 1956

My dear Jock,

Your mother has told me a little about what concerns you and I wish these lines might bring you all of what my heart, my soul are full for your sake. It seems to me that I am understanding, sharing, and all the time bearing your suffering. In Mary are we not so close? I beseech her to help you say yes as She does for me, that yes of faith in Her immaculate Heart that is our only, our unique answer to all She wills. The salvation of many souls depends on your inner attitude. On your peace, in your broken heart, depends the testimony that all those young people surrounding you expect from you on this day and time. This is what saves, the total inner outcry and faith in the love of Our Heavenly Mother.

If it were possible for me to see you again, how much would I like to tell you that all is grace and that the present hours are the most fecund in your life, the ultimate preparation for your priestly vocation. I am sure that the Holy Virgin will make all blossom again... more beautiful, more full of grace and that none of your efforts, none of your multiple sufferings will remain unrewarded and without an effect on the souls. [...] Sister T. de Jésus, ocd.

SISTER MARIE-MADELEINE DU SACRÉ CŒUR

Marie-Madeleine Wambergue, as for her, was born on February 9th, 1915. She is the eldest of 15 children and her family is from the North of France. She is second cousin to T. Philippe. She joins the Nogent Carmel on October 7th, 1942 and takes the habit on April 29th, 1943, makes her temporary profession on June 12th, 1944 and her solemn profession in 1955. The testimony of the Nogent-sur-Marne sub-prioress pinpoints her as one of the nuns implicated into her cousin's deviances. The Archive Report of the CDF also mentions a letter from the prioress

to Paul Philippe dated March 27th, 1956 indicating that she is “worried about a group of sisters that are adamant about Mother Thérèse, exiled in Rouen (3 of them altogether)¹.” Paul Philippe takes note of it and writes to Fr Marie-Eugène on April 10th, 1956 to let him know about the problem and ask him to act in consequence:

I must also ask you to please examine, in accordance with R7, the present prioress of the Nogent Carmel, the measures that seem to impose themselves concerning the two or three nuns of that convent who still believe in Fr Thomas Philippe O.P.'s mission and sanctity and wish Mother Thérèse to return and to harm the peace and tranquility of the community, by talking among themselves in common faithfulness to so sad a past.²

The name of Marie-Madeleine Wambergue does not appear in any of the two excerpts. But the measure that strikes her together with another sister the following October confirms that she is part of that small nucleus of nuns nostalgic of “so sad a past”. The archives of the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel include the copy of a speech delivered by Fr André de la Croix, the Carmelite Provincial, on the occasion of Sisters Marie de l'Eucharistie and Marie-Madeleine du Sacré Coeur's departure. The Provincial's words as to what the Carmel has been through and the two nuns' implication are incisive:

Great woe has struck the Nogent Carmel. Such things occur in the history of Salvation. We can see it throughout Church history. This woe came from meeting a heretic and a seducer. [...] The Church takes its time to act. It observes and waits. Many years have passed since it first intervened (1951). It first was rather awestruck and after taking the first measures by removing the one nun that was then in charge and having this way warded off the more urgent evil, it took sanitary precautions, so to speak. It provided care to the souls and that was the first stage of its action. The second stage was almost a surprise for many. Seeing that the measures taken were not sufficient – it seemed to some that the persons sanctioned were suffering unfair persecution – the Church had to show itself exceptionally severe. What took place was one of the gravest possible trials in the Church. The difficulty came from the fact that two doctrines were at stake at the same time: a doctrine of

1. Letter of the prioress of the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel to Paul Philippe, March 27th, 1956, ACDF.

2. Paul Philippe's letter to Fr Marie-Eugène de l'Enfant Jésus, April 10th, 1956, ACDF.

common usage and a more secretive one, especially dangerous for the souls submitted to its influence who, despite their goodwill, could no longer discern the outlines of truth. [...] Even if we must not judge the persons, we must pass a final judgment on the doctrine that that monk could teach and on the most serious consequences it entailed for the souls that kept feeding on that doctrine despite the measures taken by the Church [a cross here sends back to a note at the bottom of the page]. This is what explains the removal of two nuns that strikes the Nogent Carmel today.

In the second part of the speech, the Carmelite insists on the necessity for the monastery to turn their backs to the past from then on, in order to reconstruct the community. He thus states the measures striking the two sisters:

As it always does in such cases, the Holy Church has sought to dissolve all the groups of persons that continue to undergo the influence of and live on the condemned doctrine. This explains why the two sisters that are leaving you are being dispersed. They are not going to prison nor sent to a jail. We have very carefully chosen the Carmels that are to welcome them and the communities best adapted to each of them, the most open, the most welcoming. They are going to stay among sisters. The instructions received ask that, for a while at least, they should be surrounded with silence. They must not be written to. Neither must they write to each other¹.”

After this speech, Marie-Madeleine joins the Abbeville Carmel in which she is integrated for good. According to her obituary, this is where the proof-reading of J. Vanier’s thesis before publication takes place:

This is where [in Abbeville] she will welcome Jean Vanier, who had come to ask the prioress, Mother Marie-Paule, to have his French mistakes in his philosophy thesis corrected. Jean Vanier thus inaugurates a long relationship with the Abbeville Carmel and especially with Sister Marie-Madeleine, as passionate as he was by life with the poor and the little ones².

This narrative gives the impression that J. Vanier’s relationship with Marie-Madeleine is “inaugurated” on that occasion only. This is the version omitting older connections, that will be transmitted to the members of L’Arche at Trosly-Breuil. In 1998, the Abbeville Carmel closes

1. Fr André de la Croix, o.c.d.,’s visit, October 20th, 1956, Archives of the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel (ACN).

2. Sister Marie-Madeleine du Sacré-Cœur’s obituary, June 2011, Archives of the Czen Carmel (ACC).

down. The nuns then mostly move to Caen. This is where Marie-Madeleine dies on June 1st 2011. At the Abbeville Carmel, she is not an enclosed sister properly speaking. Her obituary that the Caen sisters have passed on to us, indicates that, although such was her status, she had been put in charge of welcoming visitors and selling the products of the Carmel on the neighbouring marketplaces¹.

What correspondence with J. Vanier has been kept begins in 1956 and is prolonged until 1966. There are moreover three photographs of Marie-Madeline Wambergue in the “NFA” file. The first two, dated October 20th, 1956, represent the very symbolic moment when she has to leave the Nogent Carmel for the one at Abbeville.

First photograph of Marie-Madeleine in Carmelite costume. At the back of it, the inscription reads:

At my sister Colette’s, where the family had gathered! On the road from Nogent to Abbeville. 20-X-56, Hargicourt.

The second photograph is also dated October 20th; the inscription at the back reads:

On the other side, the whole community are waiting to welcome me – with what charity! – it was Jesus! Arriving in Abbeville 20-X-56. At the door of the enclosure.

There is a third photograph of Marie-Madeleine Wambergue with Jean Vanier and an unknown man, bearded with fair hair. A long inscription at the back is signed “to Jacques”. It ends this way:

In Heaven will it be fully known how united we were down here.

Marie-Madeleine Wambergue’s letter to Jean Vanier, two pages written on two following evenings, “evening of the feats of the Sacred Heart” [Friday, June 17th, 1966] and “Saturday” [June 18th, 1966].

This type of communication and epistolary usage are not conform to the Carmel principles.: the sister envisages to post her letter herself on

1. One must here interrogate oneself on what led Marie-Madeleine Wambergue’s superior or superiors to give her that job. Given her past, she should never have been given this assignment (since she was “condemned” to silence). The prioress may have made this choice to preserve the community from a nun with a sulfurous past and whom exclastrate. In a my case, it may have been out of the question, for obviously unknown reasons, to exclastrate. Whatever the case may have been, this special situation was no doubt the fruit of a decision of the superior or superiors and it perhaps protected the community without allowing the nun to go back to her monastic vocation.

the first occasion, she seems to be hanging on the telephone, the very use of “tu” [instead of “vous”] is a transgression in itself and sounds deliberate (Carmelite nuns use “vous” among themselves). The letter moreover evidences numerous confusions, probably due to the fatigue she expresses with vivacity, but fatigue alone is not a sufficient explanation. The syntax is uncertain at the very least. We can observe some deviations of sense, from Christ to Christic Jean Vanier, from love for Jesus to the love of the man J. Vanier, for whom she expresses an obsessive desire. Besides, the feast of the Sacred Heart lived as a “desert” in J. Vanier’s absence does translate a state of love dependence that runs against her vows of chastity. Her use of the word “desert” shows that she is outside her eremitic vocation (in which the desert and solitude are the means to find God).

[Front side]. Evening of the feast of the Sacred Heart 10 p.m. – It is always like a first consecration to his divine Wound – “My Heart is mine”: what admirable commerce of Love the first antiphon of the Office is. “My child, give me your Heart, Jesus says to his p.e (petite épouse = little bride) and she too says it to her Beloved – exchange of love – life of love. Since I had no possible contact by tele [telephone], this feast has been if you wish in very great silence – very great poverty. Jesus wanted it that way to plunge me in deepest desert so that there should be an even greater thirst, greater desire, greater love. I am giving it all up to the Spirit, when It wants It will permit this poor little contact waiting for you – I do hope it will be tomorrow. I shall always call you entrusting it all to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart – Good night, M. b. a. [mon bien aimé = my beloved]. Jesus, I am snuggling up in your arms to go to sleep on Your Heart, which is Mine! “My little nest of love”, Jesus My Love. You attract me so much, so much, please help my poverty, help my weakness. The day at Ganache was very laborious in this stormy weather – up at 4:30 a.m. for the departure of a sister’s Breton cousins, departure for G at 8, along the road from 9 to 12:30 and again from 2 to 8 without a stop. Return here at 10 p.m. My heart was tied to yours all the time, to

[Backside] draw some strength from it. I was drunk with fatigue. This is good, very good for Jesus whom I love to distraction and gave myself over to. My t. a. [très aimé = much loved one], bless me! Guard me as I guard you with such tenderness, such burning love in and by the Holy Spirit that inspires this life of union. My Beloved – My Heart, I am dying of thirst you know! Bless your very poor toute petite.

Saturday. [June 18th, 1966]. M. b. a. tt. pe. [Mon bien aimé tout petit], Deo gratias for this short instant! My heart is all in thanksgiving for hearing the voice of the Ep. B. a. [Époux = spouse bien aimé], my poor little head is completely shrunk. Impossible to remember what might prevent your passage between the 10th and the 14th. I shall discreetly check tomorrow (I no longer know what at all). As soon as I know I shall write to you and post it on Wednesday night from Ailly [Ailly-sur-Somme] where I am going to sell again. Oh! the Holy Spirit enlightens me again. Deo gratias. It was Marthe telling me she was going to arrive at Dr¹ around the 10th: got it! Then, m. t. a. [mon très aimé = my very loved one] write to M. Pre. [Mother Prioress] according to what the Holy Spirit inspires you. She may also not come before the 11th or 12th! How could I know? Let us entrust Mary with all this, m.t.a., all, all, I am hiding with you inside Her Immaculate Heart.

Marie-Madeleine Wambergue’s letter to Jean Vanier, two pages, “Tuesday 21st [Tuesday June 21st, 1966].

This letter again evidences mental, theological and spiritual confusions; the nun is obsessed by Jean Vanier, whom she wishes to see, hear and prudently meet again at night and for whom she rewrites – with a shift of sense – a poem by St Thérèse de Lisieux. She is again perturbed by the calendar of that “Marthe” who complicates the meet-up projects. This unequivocally is a love letter, without any reserve either. The long retreat is only considered for its final prospect: that of meeting Jean again. Who incidentally is the “little Christ” referred to in the letter? Let us signal this novel and strange use of the epithet “petit” since it seems to apply to a person: “petit” evokes the universe of the “tout petits” gathered around T. Philippe, the linguistic codes which Marie-Madeleine Wambergue obviously masters. We see besides in Jacqueline d’Halluin’s letters how T. Philippe is assimilated to the Christ. Is “the little Christ” an allusion to him? The last sentences of the letter give a strange sense as well to the words used: “the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, our Mystery, the one that the Holy Spirit makes us live intensely”. What exactly is this mystery? Is it that of T. Philippe’s “graces” or the relationships between the “initiate”? It is difficult to decide here.

[Front side – black ink].

1. Note manquante dans le texte français.

Tuesday 21st 5 a.m.

M. t. pe.t. a. [Mon tout petit très aimé = My tiny little beloved one], luminous joy to welcome “our little Mira”: it was a little of you and of the P. b. a. [beloved Fr] and everything went well with her I think!

M. t. a. [Mon très aimé = My most loved one], I am giving it all to you, yesterday evening during Fr H.’s talk, which was very complex, Jesus swallowed me altogether, stuck to T. c. d’Ep. [Ton cœur d’Époux = your Spouse’s heart] I was getting drunk of all the substance of Love and of life and this morning I have given myself over deeply – as if you were here. Oh! Yes! I am passing into You and You are passing into me and there is only one flame left, soaring up straight to the father, light and pure! O my Beloved, come and set fire to your poorer and poorer girl! I know your week is so busy before Mira’s departure and I wonder if you really will be able to come on the 7th – if we were sure that Marthe were not here on the 10th - 11th - 12th. I wrote to her friend to enquire about the exact date she will arrive. I shall tell you Saturday on the teleph. between 10:30 and 11:30 probably!

The day before yesterday I saw M. Pre [Mother Prioress]: I am entering the enclosure around July 16th or 17th – rest for a week – retreat I shall apply for 12 or 15 days (if possible) and I am out for the 15th or around the 15th. If Marthe had not been here, I would have told you to come for a rest about that time and cancel your passage on July 7th or 8th! This is up to Jesus! It is obviously more prudent to come over a little more for + (more) than for 1 night – at least + (more) than a wh. (whole) day! M. t. a., let the Holy Spirit make you show up! I am welcoming you each moment/

[Backside. Blue ink]

M. b. a. – those roses in the garden are wonderful and are telling me about You – about Your heart... I am offering them to you – I am removing the petals for You!

“By plainly losing its petals, the rose gives itself over to stop being like her I give myself over to you, Little Jesus”. I am showering each of those petals with kisses! They will tell you: “Jesus I love you!” I am keeping each of your tout-petits in my heart... Great calm and true rest after pt. [petite] A.’s departure for a fortnight – I nurture pt. [petit] Christ more we do a pt. retreat together with notes sent by Cognac on the Mystery of the H. (Holy) Trinity, “Our Mystery”, the one that the Holy Spirit makes us live intensely. “O My Three”, I kiss [or bless] Your Heart and pass altogether into it by giving you all!

MOTHER MYRIAM DE LA TRINITÉ

Jeanne Ducimetière-Monod, Mother Myriam de la Trinité, was born on September 25th, 1925 in the *département* of Constantine [in present-day Algeria]. According to the information given by Mother Marie-Reine, the present prioress of the Cognac Carmel, it is in 1952 that she enters the said Carmel, where she makes her final vows in 1956. She has great aura: she was prioress from 1964 till her death in 2017. This 53-year tenure is extraordinary: after she reached the 9-year maximum the nuns had to apply to Rome for a dispensation, then the constitutions of the Carmel were changed in 1990 and it was no longer necessary to apply for a dispensation about reelection. Several testimonies that can be found on the Net allow to assess the influence of that very charismatic nun, still considered by some to be a great spiritual figure¹.

According to his correspondence with his parents², Jean Vanier went to Cognac for the first time with Jacqueline d’Halluin in the summer of 1959, to listen to M.-D. Philippe preaching his first retreat there.

Letter 1 from Mother Myriam to Jean Vanier; 2 pages, undated, after 1964.

A word for word comment of the letter, which poses many questions, would be necessary. What is that “feast of divine tenderness”? Is it an allusion to a liturgical celebration or to a lovers’ meetup? Mother Myriam seems to be prioress already since she refers to the “force of unity” and to her “little girls”. We must here again point out the abnormal use of the “tu” and stop awhile on the use of the term “my love”. Under the pen of a Carmelite nun, this phrase addressed to a man indicates a conscious transgression of quite a few social and religious norms. Mother Myriam is a woman of the 20th century, who made her vows at the age of 21 and who knows that she is the bride of Jesus-Christ since she entered the Carmel in bridal dress. There is no way this address might be considered ambiguous. It is totally explicit, on the contrary. Some other phrases similarly reveal the deviation of her vocation caused by her relationship to J. Vanier. “Your gaze full of love is all

1. Philippe de Saint-Germain, “Mère Myriam de Cognac, au centre de l’Étoile”, November 29th, 2017, read online on October 11th, 2022 on <http://conscientia.fr/2017/11/29/mere-myriam-de-cognac-au-centre-de-lettoile/>

2. J. Vanier’s letter to his parents, September 7th, 1959, APJV.

my strength”, “my sole motor is your love” mean that she belongs to him and is committed to him and not to God. J. Vanier represents an absolute on which her relation to transcendence depends; this is a deviation and even a reversal of her Carmelite vocation.

Thursday

My love, tonight, tomorrow the feast of divine Tenderness! I remain in the heart of Jesus on your heart, m. b. a.!

Your gaze full of love turned on your toute petite is all my strength!

You know, m. T. A. [mon Très Aimé] that the gaze, the Feel of Love of Your confidence is the very thing she receives from You. In me You only receive Yourself. I love You that's all Mary in me who loves Jesus in You!

Please always strongly give me your support. All should be concluded by Sunday: I am still waiting for Mgr's reaction to the letter Fr Bernard sent him. The latter wrote to me assuring that he was writing to Mgr.

Yesterday I was a bit short of strength... I feel much better this morning. Jesus's spirit gives me arms. T. H. [meaning ?] for the struggle.

I marvel at the force of unity of all my litl. girls (except... you know, but the atmosphere remains peaceful – joyful [illegible word]: this helps me a lot. But my sole motor, m. b. a. is your love. Come plunge [expose?] your [face?] – your whole body on your little flower.

M.

Lettre 2 from Mother Myriam to Jean Vanier, 2 pages, no precise date, July 23rd (after 1964 since L'Arche is mentioned). The nun is totally engulfed in her passion as the grammar, the handwriting and the vocabulary used can testify.

Marie médiatrice [name of the convent]

July 23rd

M. b. a., I love you. I am thirsty of your thirst. I am so anxious to see you, to receive your love, to give you Yours in me! My love is coming! The fire in us, the H. S. (Holy Spirit) in us makes us so much ONE more and more: tell me that we are so vitally united to each other... I feel it so much too: the H. S. is our life... I love you, my Spouse, I am so thirsty that you should affix me like a seal on your heart and I would do the same on mine: let me

tell you about your love in me. Jesus my love I keep you jealously with this intensity of Mary's Heart, of the whole being of Mary the Spouse!

As for Alix after your visit I [illegible word] fr her to come...but not early September since Isabelle is coming.

For pet. Thérèse, you know how sad I would be if she did not come to L'Arche (if it is impossible fr August, let it be fr Sept...) M. b. a. you know my heart's desire and how much I would like to entrust it to You: may the H. S. help us! I am going to write to Fr M.-D. [Marie-Dominique Philippe] to tell him a little about my surprise... You know how delicately I tell him exactly what I think! So help us God!

My tender love, my sole love. I am so thirsty to let you rest on my bride's heart as my tt.pet. king of love: the source of life drawn from the Spouse's heart. Come I love you!

M.

Letter 3 from Mother Myriam to Jean Vanier, 2 pages, undated. The letter is a marital letter, without any possible ambiguity in the minds of the two partners.

My love. I am so thirsty! I love you m. T. a. [mon Très aimé]: this tells all! Come and drink next to your little bride as I get lost in Yours, my sweet love!

Together with all the Love that the Father puts into the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, we are waiting for the Eternal Transfiguration in which we shall be united, body and soul. Waiting for THE day of eternity, my love, we are waiting poorly, ardently, for those minutes of transfiguration of the Earth where we remain in the Absolute of God, living on the reality of his Love! I love you! M.

Letter 4 from Mother Myriam to Jean Vanier, 2 pages, undated. “Mira” is mentioned. The letter is anterior to October 1969, when Mira, from L'Arche, leaves for India. “Tapes” and cassettes recorded by “the Father” are referred to. Could this be T. Philippe?

Mother Myriam expresses her impatience again: “Please do not let me wait...I love you.” The phrase “my Tenderness” shows that this is one of their lovers' codes. The relation to money is also to be observed. The use of “I”, a very personal and very liberal “I”, is surprising. The carnal aspect, here again, stands out in its transparency.

Thursday evening.

My love.

I did receive the “Treasure” this morning and I could listen to the Father for 1 hour on end. I took the litl tapes and my heart recognized what my earthly ears could not [understand]! And tonight your g. [grande = long] letter confirms that it really was him. But I did not need any confirmation. I have loved it All and espec. those gestures of love while speaking of torments...

I shall try to listen to what comes next at night, starting with The one my heart loves. [fire with which] my being loves... and which is ill... Please don't make me wait for the result of the visit if you can, o my beloved! I love you! Yes, it's me your tt. pet. My support, my Tenderness supports you and does not leave you!

Yes, I have four tracks, so I will be able to hear it all. I will send them to you a.s.a.p. – even before Mira's arrival, with a book and [notes?] that may help you for the 20th/11. The “Song of Love” by Fr. Géné[di] (an Oriental priest-monk) all imbued of pte. Th. [petite Thérèse]. You will have a complement of references from Pte. Th. All this work is done by pte. Sis. M.-Bernadette. I told her as a secret passed in confidence to a tt. petit that Th. [T. Philippe] had asked me to help him – that it was for the H. V. [Holy Virgin]”. How beautiful this family collaboration is! The H. S. [holy Spirit] is present in Mary for Jesus.

Ah yes! For pte.Th. I so strongly feel like You all right for after Christmas. I have already talked to her – pure fruit!

As to Mira... My minister of finances has given me enough for her week here. What I am giving you is for You. You will know how to use it! h

If the weather is fine – the repairs will start –, me carry this “weight” so light in my heart.

My love does press me hard on you – close to You, in You – I need you so much. My love, those gestures of love...

O my spouse! come into me, stay in me and hold me against you, interlaced the one into the other in this nuptial room where we can live, only there!

I love you and am waiting for a note after you have been diagnosed.

I am always with You in the heart of the Father. I love you.

Your toute pet. Myriam

The Carmel and L'Arche

The first generation of members of L'Arche are well acquainted with the historical links and sometimes material strong connections are established between the Abbeville Carmel and the first helpers. The second community founded in France is in Cognac, precisely with the support of Mother Myriam. A little later the Ambleteuse community is founded with the support, this time, of the Abbeville Carmel. Between the Carmelites and the new communities, many human, spiritual and sometimes material exchanges take shape, some of which have lasted to this day. Those have generally been considered happy relationships by the two parties. The anchorage of those links between the Carmel and L'Arche in the circle of the “initiate” nevertheless remains ignored or perceptible only through a few personal itineraries¹.

ABBEVILLE AND AMBLETEUSE

“Sister Marie-Mad was the main source of life for L'Arche².” Those words, used by J. Vanier in 2009 underline the important part Sister Marie-Madeleine Wambergue had in the beginnings of L'Arche. We already caught a glimpse of this in the previous chapter, in the letter of December 1963 in which T. Philippe mentioned “the union of Mother Mad. with the Trosly home”. In the 2009 interview, J. Vanier comes back with insistence on how important her support was. Beside her spiritual role, since, according to him, the nun is “the main source of life”, the Abbeville Carmel makes possible the organization of the spiritual week-ends meant for young people that L'Arche is setting up: “So Marie-Mad, this was very very important for L'Arche; the first Katimavik were in Abbeville, so it was... very important.” The first of those “Katimavik³” is thus organized in Abbeville at Easter 1972, with the active support of the Carmel. Owing to the success of this first

1. Notably that of M.-F. Pesneau, who, in 1966, enters the Boulogne Carmel, yhe third concerned by the 1956 measures. She leaves it in 1974 after being initiated by M.-D. Philippe, who later entrusts her to his brother, whom she comes to meet at Trosly-Breuil. On the Boulogne Carmel, see also chapter 9 on M.-D. Philippe.

2. Research interview, A. Mourges, 2009.

3. The word means “meeting place” in Inuktitut, the language of Eastern Canadian Inuits.

edition, the pattern is reproduced in the following years in Amiens, then Lille and eventually all over France, each time with the support of local groups of young people.

J. Vanier also mentions that “it was she [Marie-)Madeleine] who sent Henri Wambergue to L’Arche, where he was right at the beginning.” The latter, the nun’s brother, remains more than twenty years at L’Arche, where he was close to his cousin T. Philippe and to the La Ferme home. Insisting a last time that “Marie-Mad. was somebody that was very precious for L’Arche, for me”, J. Vanier adds: “I always have her photo here, next to Jacqueline’s.” We know besides that the two women were close to each other. This can be observed through four letters dating from 1987-1988 sent by Marie-Madeleine Wambergue to Jacqueline d’Halluin in which the types of salutation formulas, the persistence of the vocabulary of the “initiate” catches the reader’s eye¹. The correspondence between the two women evidences their faithfulness to Fr Dehau, T. Philippe and the Nogent Carmel before its dispersion, which did not shake the sanctioned nuns’ attachment to T. Philippe’s doctrine.

Jacqueline d’Halluin is then preparing the publication of a collection of texts by Fr Dehau, with the help of Marie-Madeleine Wambergue, who indicates where she can find the texts. She thus advises Jacqueline to contact “Sister Marie de l’Épiphanie at the St Élie Carmel of St Remy-de-Montbard” for she keeps the original of a retreat that “she took away with her in 1956!”, adding: “It was Marie-Thérèse’s treasure, that she had left us on leaving².” Sister Marie de l’Épiphanie is the nun who had been removed from the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmel at the same time as Marie-Madeleine Wambergue.

But the latter’s links with L’Arche are not limited to prolonging her connections of old with J. Vanier or J. d’Halluin. She very quickly ties up with numerous members of L’Arche for whom the Abbeville Carmel becomes a place of personal spiritual renewal. An instance of this is given by the portrait that Antoinette Maurice draws of her in her narrative of the beginnings of L’Arche³. The first meeting between J. Vanier

1. Marie-Madeleine Wambergue’s letters to Jacqueline d’Halluin, 1987 or 1988, AAI.

2. Marie-Madeleine Wambergue’s letter to Jacqueline d’Halluin, 1987 or 1988, AAI.

3. Antoinette Maurice, *op. cit.*, p.34-37.

and the nun as told by Antoinette Maurice indirectly reveals the collective will of the “initiate” to hide and camouflage a whole chunk of its history¹. Nothing fits in her narrative, neither the chronology, which places the meeting between J. Vanier and Marie-Madeleine Wambergue as early as at the end of 1963, nor the facts themselves. What she tells is told in good faith but the author is ignorant of the essential links established much before 1963 and only reports what she has been told.

Antoinette Maurice also confirms that, in the founding narratives, the Trosly-Breuil project is entrusted as early as at the end of 1963 to Marie-Madeleine Wambergue’s prayer, which gives the latter a crucial role in the memorial transmission:

Jean Vanier has always kept in touch with Sister Marie-Mad. As early as November 1963, he had asked her to pray, because he had the project of opening a small home in Trosly. This is why Sister Marie-Mad. says that L’Arche started in Abbeville.

She then reports that “Jean Vanier, Raphaël and Philippe went to the Abbeville Carmel on the Sunday following the opening.” As for the nun, she comes to visit Trosly-Breuil at least once in 1972 and obtains that a handicapped person from the Somme region be welcomed there.

Beyond this human and spiritual support, Marie-Madeleine Wambergue’s role in the foundation of a L’Arche community in the little city of Ambleteuse, 90 kilometers North of Abbeville, must also be mentioned. She puts Jean Vanier into contact with Anne-Marie Bernard, another scion of the Dehau family and another distant cousin of T. Philippe’s and Marie-Madeleine Wambergue’s. The Bernard family owned a large property in Ambleteuse, meant to house several charities. Marie-Madeleine Wambergue gets into touch at a moment when the place is empty and the family are seeking to find it a new affectation. She suggests giving it to L’Arche and organizes a first meeting between Jean Vanier and Anne-Marie Bernard on May 12th, 1968. A first group attached to Trosly-Breuil settles in as early as September 1970 and two years later the L’Arche community of the ‘Three Fountains’ is officially inaugurated.

1. Antoinette Maurice was Jean Vanier’s deputy-director at Trosly-Breuil as of 1969. Being close to J. Vanier, T. Philippe or Marie-Madeleine Wambergue as early as 1965, it is evident that she had a privileged access to their relation of the events.

We must at last mention that, if the Abbeville Carmel supports the first communities of L'Arche, it receives several young women with a religious vocation in exchange. The list of names of the Abbeville Carmel, kept in the archives of the Caen Carmel, show that in the 1970s and 1980s – it closed down in 1998 – the rare new entrants are members of L'Arche or close to it.

In chronological order, the first is “Françoise”¹. She takes the cloth on October 8th, 1972 and makes her solemn vows on October 1st, 1978. She eventually gives up religious life in the 1980s. Then comes “Thérèse”, who takes the habit under that name in 1973 but leaves a few years later. We know that she was a resident of the La Ferme home, close to T. Philippe, and remains a member of a community of L'Arche. There is then a young assistant of American origin, “Sister Rachel”, a correspondent of J. Vanier's mentioned in chapter 6, who enters the Carmel in 1973 and takes the habit in October 1974. She later on moves to a Carmel in England. The last two entrants join in the 1980s. This is first the case of “Sister Marie-Claude”, a young woman from Senlis, who frequents the Trosly-Breuil community without committing herself to it. She makes simple vows in October 1984 and solemn vows in October 1988. She is still a Carmelite today. The last entrant is “Sister Marguerite”, a young assistant at Trosly-Breuil, who takes the habit on May 21st, 1988, makes her solemn vows on May 29th, 1993 and in March 1998 becomes the last prioress of the Abbeville Carmel, the closing down of which she organizes. She gives up religious life a few years later. There lastly remains to mention Anne-Marie Christmann, whose situation will be detailed in part 4 of this report. Arriving at L'Arche in 1989, she there lives a sort of conversion under the direction of Gilbert Adam, the chaplain of the community. She discerns her religious vocation with him and decides to join the Carmel. This list enables us to assess the intensity of human and spiritual links between the community of L'Arche and the Abbeville Carmel.

Marie-Madeleine Wambergue's letters to Jacqueline d'Halluin shed light on the climate in which Sisters “Marie-Claude” and “Marguerite” are plunged as they enter the Carmel. In a first excerpt, Marie-Madeleine Wambergue mentions the two young women:

1. The names here have been replaced by pseudonyms.

I am happy with what you are telling me about “Marguerite”. Don't hesitate to pass uncle Pierre's little pearls on to her to prepare her for her entrance... Help her at least for this is really the job of the Holy Spirit! I had given “Marie-Claude” the retreat on the Sacred Heart and she kept it throughout her postulate and her noviciate. [...] Oh yes, let us give thanks for such unity. Yesterday I received from Jean-Marie Gsell¹ the photo of Mother Cécile with Fr Thomas and the [petites?] and that of Mother Cécile alone – I shared this with “Marie-Claude” – we kept one each and will exchange them from time to time².

The two young women are oriented towards the works of Fr Dehau and maintained in the memory of the important figures of the original group of “initiated” women, such as Mother Cécile Philippe. Marie-Madeleine Wambergue specifies elsewhere that Sister Marie-Claude had the opportunity to meet Mother Cécile on the occasion of a period of rest that she had taken at the Langeac monastery³.

A last document illustrates the manifold secret and public dimensions of the relationship between J. Vanier, L'Arche and Marie-Madeleine Wambergue. This is the letter that J. Vanier writes at the moment when the nun is buried in June 2011. A copy is kept in the archives of the Caen Carmel. What is reproduced here is the essential of a text that is to be read at two different levels:

1. Jean-Marie Gsell originates from Abbeville. He spent a year at Trosly-Breuil in 1975-1976. He had joined the St John Community in 1979, but asked to be released from his priestly obligations and his vows in 2021. His brother Alain Gsell was committed to the Trosly-Breuil Arche for several years; he was close to T. Philippe and the La Ferme group. He then became the first director of the community of L'Arche called d'Aigrefoin in Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse.

2. Marie-Madeleine Wambergue's letter to Jacqueline d'Halluin, 1987 or 1988, AAI.

3. The Saint Catherine of Sienna in Langeac houses the community of contemplative Dominican nuns to which Mother Cécile Philippe was sent after she was removed from Bouvines in 1956. There she takes the name of Sister Marie de Nazareth. During the first decade of her presence, she was the object of strict surveillance (no unauthorized visit, mail under control). She then recovers a certain amount of liberty and even a certain aura. Her brother T. Philippe visits her regularly and several assistants of the Trosly-Breuil community become nuns there.

Dearest Marie-Madeleine,

Jesus, your Beloved, has come to take you away.
He felt like having you with him after all those long years of life.

A song of Isaiah comes to my mind (62)

The nations will call you by a new Name
Which God gave you.
You will be in God's hand
Like a Crown of glory.

Isaiah goes on:
God will call you.
My Pleasure is in her,
For God finds his Delight in you.

For the One that rebuilds you will marry you
As the Spouse marries a virgin,
As the bridegroom rejoices over the spouse.
You shall be the joy of your God.

Yes, you have been
And you are the joy of Jesus.
He called you,
He gave himself to you,
You welcomed his Love, his heart,
You gave yourself to Him.

So now you are liberated from the bowels of the Earth,
To rush into the arms of your Spouse.

Yes, Jesus is happy with you,
L'Arche is happy with you
and says: thank you.

In your life as a Carmelite
In Nogent, in Abbeville, then in Caen
You offered yourself for the life of L'Arche, "Faith and Light",
for the vulnerable and the weak.
You watched over all of us. I...]

COGNAC AND LA MERCI

Together with the Cognac Carmel, Mother Myriam constitutes the second pole of the relation between the Carmel and L'Arche. A whole series of indications testify of the durable proximity of this Carmel and its prioress with M.-D. Philippe and J. Vanier and, beyond that, with the communities they founded, since both L'Arche and the Brothers of St John established a foundation in the vicinity of this Carmel.

On this point, the documents at our disposal in the archives are incomplete. They mostly consist of the narratives about the foundation of the La Merci community of L'Arche that the latter has kept, among which that of a turn sister of the Carmel. The gaps in those public narratives are compensated for by the information collected from a meeting with the present prioress of the Carmel, Mother Marie-Reine, and one of her advisers¹ and also by the information given by Fr Jean-Eudes, in charge himself of the "Abuse Commission" of the Brothers of St John, who was beside at the head, from 2009 to 2013, of the priory of his community established at Richemont, in the vicinity of the Carmel.

Even if it rests on the memories of the persons encountered, the information collected helps us delineate a history of the relationships between Mother Myriam, M.-D. Philippe and J. Vanier. The two men and Jacqueline d'Halluin's first visit dates back to the Summer of 1959. According to the sisters, it was the prioress of the Figeac Carmel (one of those implicated in 1956) who had advised to appeal to M.-D. Philippe because "he spoke of the Virgin beautifully". From 1959 to 1975, the Dominican came to preach as many as four retreats at the Carmel each year and was very much appreciated by the community. According to the sisters again, the relationships were no longer so good from the moment the Brothers of St John were founded in 1975. Expressing a view that seems largely anchored in the memory of the community and was that of Mother Myriam, they insist that the foundation of the Brothers of St John would have been the beginning of M.-D. Philippe's durable distraction. From that moment on, the retreats would have been

1. Meeting on Friday June 16th, 2021. During the exchange, which took place in a climate of confidence, the elements unearthed by the Commission were passed on to the sisters.

dull, without their previous “breath of the Spirit”. Mother Myriam would apparently have often said that M.-D. Philippe should never have founded any community, for he did not have the charisma of a founder nor that of a trainer of monks.

In spite of this, the Carmel never stopped calling on him and he continued to come and reach at least once a year, until age prevented him from moving about. Confirming the persistence of the relationships, Fr Jean-Eudes underlines the fact that the links between M.-D. Philippe and the Cognac Carmel never came loose. His Cognac retreats, often bearing on the *Song of Songs*, were a well-known yearly landmark for his close circle and he would often invite outside attendees. We have an instance of this in a letter sent from Lourdes by A. de Rosambo to J. Vanier in September 1969, in which she writes: “I am going to Cognac fr. the retreat from the 28th to the 3rd.”

One last element testifies of how strong those links were: the foundation of a Brothers of St John priory in the vicinity of the Carmel. From the information collected by Fr Jean-Eudes when consulting the dossier relative to its foundation, the priory had been wished for by both Mother Myriam and the diocese since 1982, but the project only came to fruition in 1992. From that moment on, the Brothers of St John become the chaplains of the Carmel, where they perform the daily service.

As to J. Vanier, the sisters report that he too became one of the usual preachers of the community, coming to *preach* at least once a year from the mid-1970s onward. They remember well the daily pattern of those retreats: J. Vanier would “give the floor” two hours a day to the sisters, who say that they gained much from his teachings. According to them he would then devote much of his time to visits from outside persons. He would meet Mother Myriam every morning in the parlor, from behind the grill. Similarly, he could occasionally, counsel a few sisters.

But as with M.-D. Philippe, this personal connection of the Carmel with J. Vanier is soon coupled with an institutional link by the foundation of a community of L’Arche in the vicinity of Cognac. The different narratives of this foundation make it possible to follow its chronology and highlight the significant elements of its links with the Carmel. This foundation will be the second of L’Arche in France after the one at Trosly-Breuil; the project emerges at the same time as that of the first foundations abroad, in Canada and India. The Ambleteuse project takes

shape shortly after. The way those two projects are supported by those Carmels is a testimony of the role the Carmelite order plays in the rapid initial expansion of L’Arche in France.

The circumstances of the foundation of the community called “La Merci” also evidence the continuity with the period preceding the creation of L’Arche. We actually can, right from the very first years of the latter, observe that the habit of pilgrimages to Rome, La Salette, Lourdes or Fatima is continued. It is on its way to the latter sanctuary that a group from Trosly-Breuil stops overnight at the Cognac Carmel. The Trosly-Breuil community is at that moment looking for a place where groups might regularly come on holiday. This at first is the topic discussed with the Carmelites. Among the narratives on the Cognac foundation is a small dossier of souvenirs collected by these in 1995 on demand from Patrick Fontaine (then in charge of the community). It notably contains several pages of memories of Sister Marie-Geneviève, an extern sister, who closely followed the foundation project. She describes the part she played to find a property for sale by touring the surrounding countryside with the “delivery driver” of the convent. This is how they would have discovered a large abandoned property. To start the negotiations, Mother Myriam musters the help of a couple, friends of the Carmel who will become unwavering supporters of the L’Arche community. As to what followed, this is Sister Marie-Geneviève’s narrative:

The next week, Jean Vanier and Jacqueline d’Halluin came to “admire the ruins”. Jean, as (friend of the Carmel) and L’Arche) was very hesitant, but Jacqueline d’Halluin found it all wonderful. The project nearly flopped twice, but Jacqueline, Mother Myriam and myself wanted it to succeed¹.

This passage indicates how committed the nuns were to convincing J. Vanier. We also note the part played by Jacqueline d’Halluin, whom we sense to have been on the Carmelites’ side. After some repair, the house first serves to welcome groups of holidaymakers from Trosly-Breuil. But the ownership of such a big building soon suggests the project of a permanent foundation. According to the sister, her insistence and Mother Myriam’s play an important role in convincing J. Vanier to take the plunge:

1. “Souvenirs de Sœur Marie-Geneviève sur la fondation de la Merci”, April 14th, 1995, Archives of L’Arche de La Merci (AALM).

Each time he came, I was beseeching Jean to found us an Arche like in Trosly, not to leave the house unoccupied for months at a time. [...] The day eventually came when, before leaving for a conference in Cognac, Jean said to me: “If you insist so much, give me names and possibly a few benefactors”. When he came back there were two lists waiting for him on his bedside table: 28 names of handicapped persons, 18 of whom were members of Saint-Jacques, our parish, and a list of 19 potential benefactors¹.

This leads to the opening of a work assistance centre in October 1969 and a first home in January 1970, a date considered to be the founding of La Merci. We may think that Sister Marie-Geneviève’s narrative tends to overstate the part played by her community in that foundation. Those of this couple friend of the Carmel and Agnès and Antonio Da Silva (the founding couple) point out other influences too, while recognizing the Carmelites’ prominent role. This is what Agnès Da Silva does in a testimony written in November 1974:

A presence which, for us, was the certainty that we had to work, pray and wait was, and still is, that of the Cognac Carmelites... I shall never forget that evening in June, before that meeting I was so much afraid of; I had taken refuge up in our little chapel in the attic to cry, out of fatigue, of tension... when the telephone rang and I heard Mother Myriam’s soft voice saying: “We are so close to you tonight...”. The meeting was difficult... but I could feel a peace inside me that was not coming from me².

As to the name La Merci, Agnès Da Silva explains its origin in a text written twenty years later:

The name “LA MERCI”, found through the joint inspiration of Jean V. and Jacqueline d’H. was meant to recall the role played by MARY (Jesus’ mother) in the liberation of the slaves and chained convicts in Africa as early as the 15th century. The idea was to place this nascent community under Our Lady’s protection to help its members find the inner liberation of which God has the secret³!

1. “Souvenirs de Sœur Marie-Geneviève sur la fondation de la Merci”, April 14th, 1995, AALM.

2. Agnès Da Silva, “La fondation de la Communauté de La Merci”, published in “Ensemble” (probably a sheet of community news) November 1974, AALM.

3. Agnès and Adriano Da Silva, “Souvenirs des “début” pour les 25 ans de “la MERCI”, 1995, AALM.

The process here is identical to the one that led to picking on the name “L’Arche” in 1964 and we can observe this selfsame will to place this second French community under the patronage of the Virgin Mary. Like in Trosly too, it is through Jacqueline d’Halluin that a statue of the Virgin, offered by Mother Myriam, is placed at the centre of the community¹. In this present of Mother Myriam, we can see a discreet reminder of the link between the Carmel and the nascent Arche. The strength of this link is expressed with force in the introduction to the collection of the Carmelites’ memories published on the occasion of the 25 anniversary of the foundation of La Merci in 1995. Though unsigned, this introduction was probably written by the prioress:

Jean had been acquainted with our Carmel before he went to stay in Fatima. The links that were henceforth woven with L’Arche contributed to setting up the “unique family” of L’Arche and the Carmel, from which the foundation of La Merci sprang as if from a unique source².

Conclusion

One is struck by the existence of two histories running parallel: one, official, is the history of a fine synergy between contemplative nuns, apostolic monks and secular works; the other, secret, is revealed through letters, is that of deviant or wasted vocations. In between the two lies the unexplored continent of the governance of souls and communities. The regulators (the role of ecclesiastical superiors, the respect of the enclosure, the usage as to the transfer of nuns, etc.) did not function.

The principle of a special election of some nuns, posed by the Philippes, makes the transgression or the inversion of all the norms proper to Carmelite, religious or even spiritual life acceptable or even desirable. Despite this logic one wonders how the Carmelites “elected” could remain Carmelites. The men they frequented encouraged them to keep the same status whereas they were making them live “something else”.

1. “Souvenirs de Sœur Marie-Geneviève sur la fondation de la Merci”, April 14th, 1995, AALM.

2. Introduction to the collection of the Carmelites’ memories about the foundation of “La Merci” April 14th 1995, AALM.

They were thus durably maintained in a contradiction and a double life forcing them to tiring exercises of dissimulation with noxious consequences for their communities. We do not know if the Carmelites implicated, some of whom were or had been prioresses, were aware of the impact of their double life and double talk on the communities of which they were in charge.

French Carmels have, to this day, had the reputation to be a religious path of excellence, particularly demanding, which has always aroused a mixed feeling of fascination and repulsion (in so far as it is a kind of disavowal of the world and an abandon of one's family). It was good for the legitimacy of L'Arche and St John to be able to avail themselves of the support and prayer of the Carmels. It was also good to be in a capacity to provide the secular members of L'Arche with such places of spiritual renewing, where they could benefit from counseling. Just like the Philippons, J. Vanier found it convenient, in a sense, that those women should remain Carmelites.

CHAPTER 9:
**Jean Vanier and
 Marie-Dominique Philippe
 (1950-1976)**

Florian Michel

This chapter aims at historically pinpointing the contact points between J. Vanier and Marie-Dominique Philippe (1912-2006) for the period between L'Eau vive and the two foundations of L'Arche (1964) and the Brothers of St John (1975). The background stake is to define a field of study between the networks that the two men respectively created: that of L'Arche and that of the Brothers of St John, which are like two branches of a same family, close by their common sources and a shared history, but very distinct in their vocations, their finalities and ecclesial insertions (a secular society vs. a religious congregation) and expanding in diverging directions (secular, ecumenical, inter-religious for L'Arche vs. apostolical, contemplative for the St John family) over a relatively short lapse of time.

M.-D. Philippe presents several faces. The first one, official, masterly, founding, is the one biographers and historians know¹. It was

1. Marie-Christine Lafon, *Marie-Dominique Philippe. Au cœur de l'Église du XX^e siècle*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2015 ; Étienne Fouilloux, "PHILIPPE Marie-Dominique", *Dictionnaire biographique des frères prêcheurs* [Online], Biographical notices put on line on March 25th 2019, URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/dominicains/3861>

publicized by his university teachings, his numerous publications, his multiple talks to large audiences, the foundation of the Brothers of St John, an abundant media coverage, etc. Against that large recognition, the second face, obscure and well-kept, is much more difficult to characterize. The man seems to have been cleverly eschewing the sanctions that struck close members of his family – his uncle, brother, sister – in 1956 whereas he actually was himself in the eye of the cyclone. He was in fact condemned by the Holy Office on February 2nd, 1957, eight months after his brother: he had no longer the right to confess, either men or women, could not counsel spiritually any more nor could he teach anything having to do with spirituality¹. On February 19th, 1957, the decision is notified to M.-D. Philippe, who, according to a handwritten note of the Master general (AGOP), filially accept the sentence. This being said, he does not seem to understand anything whatsoever to his own condemnation nor recognize any fault. In March 1957 he writes in that sense to the Master general:

Your fatherly kindness has helped me... accept all lovingly... without trying to understand... [...] I perhaps erred. I may have lacked prudence, reacted sometimes too brutally face to some falls in brotherly charity or discretion. I beg your pardon².

Reading him, his potential faults – “falls in brotherly charity”, indiscretions – would be less grievous than those of others.

Only him, plus a few members of the general Dominican Curia in Rome and the Provincial of France are informed of the exact scope of the condemnation. As it happens, not only does the condemnation by the Holy Office remain secret, but application of the penalty is reduced by the Master general of the Order, who had tried to protect him, so that it might remain as invisible as possible. Thus M.-D. Philippe, despite his condemnation, keeps his job at the Fribourg university, where he

1. Letter from Cardinal Giuseppe Pizzardo, Prefect of the Congregation of the Holy Office, to Fr Michael Browne, Master general of the Order of Preachers, February 7th 1957, Prot. N. 513/55, AGOP et ACDF : “P. Dominicus Philippe, OP, dimittatur cum suspensione ab audiendis sacramentalibus confessionibus fidelium et a quavis directione spirituali ad nutum S. Officii, et ad mentem. *Mens est : al P. Philippe non deve essere affidato l'insegnamento di materie attinenti alla spiritualità.*”

2. M.-D. Philippe's letter to the Master general, March 20th, 1957, AGOP.

does not teach spirituality but philosophy, and continues to publish philosophical works, thus keeping up appearances.

The secret was very well kept. The victim of this “duty of confidentiality” and of the “complete silence on that affair [of L'Eau vive]”¹, the biography devoted to M.-D. Philippe in 2015 multiplies approximations and prudent references to this point. “Fr M.-D. Philippe, one may read, is probably also concerned by the sanction [of 1956]. It seems that he was forbidden to preach and say mass in public for several months”². This statement, erroneous, is the very sign of the secret that surrounded the decision of the Holy Office among the milieus close to M.-D. Philippe.

Ordained priest at Le Saulchoir in Kain, Belgium, in 1936, he is a member of the French Province and as such submitted to the authority of the Provincial for France. In July 1945 he is appointed professor of philosophy at the Fribourg University, a job he holds almost continuously until he retires, aged 70, in 1982. While punctually teaching at L'Eau vive and Le Saulchoir, now located in Étiolles, France, he finds himself *de jure* assigned to the Albertinum convent in Fribourg, placed under the Master general's authority.

The first time J. Vanier and M.-D. Philippe meet is at 1950 at L'Eau vive, where the latter is invited to teach and where he spiritually accompanies a certain number of young women. They are sixteen years apart in age. Their relation is friendly, familiar, confident, close to spiritual direction at key moments (1951-1956, 1976). A link of subordination exists between the two men, as between a priest-professor and a secular Ph.D. candidate, but what chiefly links them is their proximity and friendship owing to J. Vanier's administrative responsibilities at L'Eau vive after June 1952. The connection between the two is, of course, the figure of T. Philippe, a half-brother through his mother for the one, the spiritual director of the other. The ordeals of L'Eau vive as well as the thesis on Aristotle³ serve to reinforce their links. *Last but not least*, there is a common *culture* and shared relationships. Very concretely, some women, partners or victims, such as Jacqueline d'Halluin, Anne de

1. Marie-Christine Lafon, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

2. Marie-Christine Lafon, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

3. On this point, see chapter 4.

Rosanbo and Marie-France Pesneau, for instance, move about between L'Eau vive, L'Arche and The St John family. Some victims of T. Philippe at L'Eau vive come and seek advice from M.-D. Philippe's, who maintains confusion¹, to the point that one of them writes: "I keep having deep compassion, pity and mercy for Fr Thomas, but I have none for M.-D. Philippe".² And, for the Dominican Provincial for France, she stresses the latter's "consummate cunning".

M.-D. Philippe has left few traces behind in the archives. His personal archives at the seat of the Brothers of St John in Rimont are poor as concerns the period before the Brothers of St John were founded. In 2019 Étienne Fouilloux was still noting that "the dossiers concerning M.-D. Philippe are as little accessible as those concerning his brother Thomas." The Dominicans archives, however, are now accessible in Paris (ADPF) and in Rome (AGOP). For the 1950s, they hold 14 letters written by M.-D. Philippe altogether – 3 of them in the ADPF and 11 in the AGOP – as well as naturally a certain number of archived acts relative to him. A crucial point is that the Holy Office file, opened in 1955 under reference 513/55 was made (partly) accessible to the Study Commission in December 2021. It includes testimonies, investigation reports, original letters by M.-D. Philippe, Alix Parmentier, etc. J. Vanier's personal archives (APJV) also include a few letters from M.-D. Philippe to J. Vanier. Numerous letters from J. Vanier, Jacqueline d'Halluin and Anne de Rosanbo, or from J. Vanier to his parents help shed complementary light on M.-D. Philippe's role among the circle of the "tout-petits".

The acme would be to assess the exchanges between the two men and the two networks in the light of the hold and abuse phenomena. Are we faced by a same culture drawn from the same sources? Or varieties of it? Several theoretical hypotheses can be envisaged. The major hypothesis, the more cynical in one sense, which no concrete element

1. See the following letters: from Fr Avril to Fr Suarez, June 28th, from M.-D. Philippe to M. Guérout, November 23rd, 1950, and the Relation of the Fr Commissioner of the Holy Office, November 1955- January 1956, file 513 / 55, ACDF. In his letter of November 23rd, 1950, M.-D. Philippe invites a victim of T. Philippe to more "inner meekness" and to "total abandon".

2. Madeleine Guérout's letter to Fr Vincent Ducatillon, July 22nd, 1952, ADPF.

comes to support, would be that the two men exchange in full light about the sexual practices and crude reality of the abuses. The minor hypothesis, equally impossible to support concretely, would be that the abuses are developed separately within the two networks without any point of convergence. The reality is more complex: the two men circulate between the two, some women too and so do practices. The answers brought here would wish to remain so to speak flush to the historical documentation, which will be quoted at length in order to establish the facts and *show* the documents.

J. Vanier, M.-D. Philippe and L'Eau vive

J. Vanier and M.-D. Philippe meet at L'Eau vive in Autumn 1950. If the exact date is not certain – in November probably¹ – the circumstances are reversely well characterised already².

According to Charles Journet's testimony, M.-D. Philippe considers J. Vanier as T. Philippe's potential successor at the head of L'Eau vive as early as February 1952:

Among the young, there is one, aged 28 [24 actually], who apparently has remarkable administrative capacities and to whom Fr M.-Dominique thinks Fr Thomas should hand over the reins. All this information comes from M.-D. Philippe, who keeps his independence from his brother and is a bit diffident from the latter's too exclusively Marian spirituality, but is persuaded that things are now on the right path³.

M.-D. Philippe's stance to his elder brother is difficult to define with certainty. He poses as being independent, diffident, confident that the difficulties will be solved, according to what Charles Journet reports in February 1952. Other testimonies reversely indicate that he is very close to his brother and watchful of his family's reputation:

1. In November 1950, M.-D. Philippe is at L'Eau vive, where he confesses a victim T. Philippe (Madeleine Guérout's testimony, June 22nd, 1952, p. 4, ADPF).

2. See chapter 2.

3. Charles Journet's letter to Jacques Maritain, February 6th, 1952, *Correspondance*, vol. 4, p. 186.

Poor Marie-Dominique is mad with grief, Jean de Menasce writes in April 1952. The indiscretions have terribly impaired his situation at Le Saulchoir. The idea that Fr Dehau may have erred as to the line to follow seems to him impossible, inadmissible¹.

In June 1953, Charles Journet, however, admits that he does not know anything directly:

As to Fr Thomas, I do not know anything but by the rebound. Fr Marie-Dominique, who is here but only rarely comes to see me, told me he was in a private psychiatric hospital recommended by Thompson, the director of which is a believer who works wonders with young French patients; that he had recovered his peace, that his health was good and that the Master general had expressed his deep confidence in him².

In M.-D. Philippe's words to Charles Journet, we can notice the objective will to have it known that the problem is well on its way to being solved, much in the crude style of the phrase: "Move along, there's nothing here to write home about". For the Dominicans of France, on the contrary, it is clear that their confidence in M.-D. Philippe is seriously undermined as early as 1955:

As for Fr Marie-Dominique Philippe, I could not caution anyone enough against his influence. He is assuredly *persona grata* among the secular leaders of L'Eau vive [Jean Vanier, Mme de Cossé-Brissac], who would have liked him to be the intellectual and spiritual director of the place, which he incidentally frequents assiduously. But on top of this he also continuously exercises an influence very hostile to the Province³.

The most critical, however, and most insightful too owing to his very function and the means of investigation at his disposal is Paul Philippe, from the Holy Office:

1. Jean de Menasce's letter to Charles Journet, quoted in a letter from Charles Journet to Jacques Maritain, April 12th, 1952, *Correspondance*, vol. 4, p. 204-205.

2. Charles Journet's letter to Jacques Maritain, June 19th, 1953, *Correspondance*, vol. 4, p. 271.

3. Answer of Fr Ducatillon, now Provincial, to Fr Gobert, *socius* of to the Master general for the French-speaking provinces, September 23rd, 1955, ADPF. Ducatillon (1898-1957) is Provincial for France from 1954 to 1957 – he dies on June 26th, 1957.

I must confess, he writes to the Provincial for France in June 1956, that I would be more prone to judge the disciples more severely than the master: the latter is partly irresponsible. But what about a Jean Vanier? a Mother Cécile [Philippe]? a Fr Marie-Dominique? They knew but wanted to cover everything, "did not want to judge"...¹

The "thou shall not judge" is found here again, which is also the constant and convenient stance of the one who "knows" but, by not pronouncing himself "covers". This is however not the place to retrace in detail the elements of M.-D. Philippe's canonical trial, which brought about his condemnation in February 1957. From the point of view of the L'Arche Study Commission, what is important is to understand well that at the judicial level, files are opened for by the Holy office for the two brothers – one for each –, that M.-D. Philippe is not condemned only for "covering" his brother but also for faults in his spiritual direction, for a suspicion of charges similar to those bearing on his brother and also because J. Vanier and him appear linked, after the 1956 condemnation, as the two masculine figures considered "responsible".

A document present both in the Dominican archives (ADPF) and in those of the Holy Office (ACDF) helps show the exchanges within the Philippe network at the end of June 1956. Alix Parmentier, the future founder of the Contemplative Sisters of St John, is very close to M.-D. Philippe and Mother Cécile, the Philippes' sister, but also to J. Vanier. The letter she sends to Mother Cécile on June 11th, 1956 is intercepted by Canon Gérard Huyghe. Her spiritual director was M.-D. Philippe and she envisaged at the time to join the Bouvines monastery. She reports the measures that have just been taken against L'Eau vive to Mother Cécile, as well as all the rumours exchanged in the sanctioned milieu:

An attack again against L'Eau vive... which will have to have disappeared y June 30th... Fr Marie-Dominique arrived from Fribourg yesterday morning to learn it all from J. Vanier, who had himself received the blow. Quite a coincidence, to say the least. I went to the Boulogne carmel yesterday afternoon to meet the Fr [M.-D. Philippe] and this is where he told me all about it under the seal of absolute secrecy (except from you, Mother). Fr Marie-Dominique expects that he will bear the brunt of the blame. I cannot

1. Fr Paul Philippe's letter to Fr Ducatillon, June 20th, 1956, ADPF.

describe how hard the blow seems to me; and the way the Fr, whom I saw last night, and J. Vanier reacted has struck me a lot¹.

As was said, M.-D. Philippe is condemned in his turn by the Holy Office in February 1957. The condemnation is lifted in May-June 1959. In Rome at the end of May 1959, M.-D. Philippe does not only meet his brother, whom he is allowed to regularly talk with, but also the Master general of the Order. The latter applies to Cardinal Pizzardo, Prefect of the Congregation of the Holy Office toward his rehabilitation. The Holy Office agrees to it on May 27th. Cardinal Pizzardo informs the Master general of the decision on June 9th, 1959: the Holy Office grants full rehabilitation to M.-D. Philippe². Two points clearly stand out from Cardinal Pizzardo's letter. It is indeed on request of the Master general that the Holy Office is reconsidering M.-D. Philippe's case; from now on it is to the Master general's discernment, his "prudence" and his "conscience" that M.-D. Philippe is entrusted. The "full rehabilitation" granted is not equivalent to a whitewash, but a grace of mercy and benevolence from the Holy Office, which urges M.-D. Philippe to lead a "truly priestly life" from now on.

The news of his rehabilitation reaches M.-D. Philippe on June 12th. The same day, the Master general writes to the Provincial for France: "I have the great pleasure to announce that Fr Marie-Dominique Philippe has been fully rehabilitated in his priestly powers by the Holy See."³

From Frbourg on June 19th, 1959, M.-D. Philippe writes a letter of thanks to the Master general, in which he assures him of his "filial obedience", but it which one will look in vain for the least sign of recognition for the "grace" with which he has been favoured:

1. Alix Parmentier's letter to Mother Cécile Philippe, June 11th 1956, ADPF and ACDF.
 2. Letter from Cardinal G. Pizzardo, of the Holy Office, to the Master general of the Order of Preachers, Fr Michael Browne, June 9th, 1959, ACDF et AGOP: "Con pregiato Foglio del 23 maggio 1959 Vostra Paternità Rev. ma chiedeva la completa riabilitazione del P. Maria-Domenicano Philippe, che il S. Offizio, in data 6 febbraio 1957, aveva sospeso dalle confessioni e direzione spirituale dei fedeli. In proposito mi reco a premura di comunicarLe che gli Em. mi Padri di questa Suprema, nell'Adunanza Plenaria di Feria IV del 27 maggio 1959, attesa la commendatizia di Vostra Paternità, hanno così decretato: "Pro gratia, qua remittitur conscientiae et prudentiae Magistri Gen. lis o. p. plena rehabilitatio Patris Mariae Dominici Philippe, o. p."
 3. Letter from Fr Michael Browne, Master general, to Fr Joseph Kopf, the successor of Fr Ducatillon at the head of the Province of France, June 12th, 1959, III M 96, ADPF.

I received your letter from the 12th this morning. You know how deeply grateful I am for all you have done for me and for your kindness over these past years, which were so hard. You know that I want to thank you above all in prayer, and also in my daily work and my whole priestly ministry. Asking so hard from Our Lord and His Mother that this work and this ministry should be all Theirs and to their will. I very much rely on your fatherly prayers for me to be very faithful to what the Church requires¹.

The rapidity of the rehabilitation cannot but seem surprising. It can be explained by the recommendation of the Master general, Fr Browne, but it cannot be understood in the new circumstances of the Church's life. John XXIII is elected on October 28th, 1958; as early as January 1959, the second Vatican Council is summoned; a fresh spirit is blowing over Rome; the Holy Office, emblematic of yesteryear's severity is called on to show more indulgence before changing names in December 1965. The archives of the Provincial allow to assess the immediate impact for France: on June 12th, 1959, M.-D. Philippe is "reestablished in the exercise of all his priestly powers", on June 30th it is Yves-Marie Congar's turn and on July 3rd of the same year it is that of Marie-Dominique Chenu to be "re-established in his rights"²; within three weeks, three famous Dominicans of the Province of France are thus rehabilitated by the Holy office.

M.-D. Philippe, J. Vanier's adviser?

The two men – we can now assess it – meet frequently, mostly in the context of L'Eau vive, from 1950 on. J. Vanier also attentively follows the retreats that M.-D. Philippe preaches here and there, for instance at the Bellefontaine Trappe in September 1955³, at Paray-le-Monial in September 1956⁴, in Bouvines in October 1956, at Bellefontaine again in

1. M.-D. Philippe's letter to the Master general, June 12th, 1959, AGOP.
 2. Files of the Provincials, ADPF.
 3. See J. Vanier's letter to his parents, July 31st, 1955, as well as the following letter (undated – end of September 1955), APJV: "Father Abbot at B. [Bellefontaine] was very good to me. I listened to P. M.-Do with the Trappists – and even sung complies with them."
 4. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, September 25th, 1956, APJV.

December 1956¹ and a few years later at the Cognac Carmel in August 1959², etc. Once his brother has been removed, M.-D. Philippe in a way substitutes for him as J. Vanier's adviser in 1955-1956. We can thus read in a letter that J. Vanier sends to his parents in December 1955:

Of course, I shall do what Mgr Roy desires. Fr M-Do thinks I might perhaps go to Canada at Easter and once there spend three months in a retreat at the Seminar or somewhere else... and then be ordained end of June or July [...]. Marie-Do thinks it would be better if I could have a three months' retreat and rest before being ordained – incidentally 3 months will permit to give subdiaconate and diaconate at spaced intervals³.

When L'Eau vive closes down, the two men meet in Paris in June 1956, at a moment when they appear as the two masculine figures which the decisions of the Holy Office are aimed at without their being fully conscious of it:

Fr Marie-Dominique is very serene. I saw him in Paris yesterday [June 11th, 1956]. He had just heard about the measures taken against dear Mother Cécile in Bouvines. There is no measure taken against Fr Marie-Do. We are so happy about it. The Most Holy Virgin has spared him⁴.

They, however, are both *associated* by the Holy Office and *united* by the storm around. After the forced dispersion of the Summer of 1956, J. Vanier remains very close to M.-D. Philippe. The two of them meet regularly and still have exchanges on the vocational question⁵. In 1957, J. Vanier is attentively reading M.-D. Philippe's works, and especially *Le Mystère de l'amitié divine*⁶ [The Mystery of divine friendship]. He is the one who drives M.-D. Philippe to Fr Dehau's bedside in Bouvines

1. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, December 29th, 1956, APJV.

2. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, September 7th, 1959, APJV: "I have spent a good little retreat at the Cognac Carmel with Fr Marie-Dominique Philippe. It is a small Carmel, very young, which has just been founded with a young Mother Prioress too."

3. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, December 8th, 1955, APJV.

4. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, June 12th, 1956, APJV.

5. See for instance J. Vanier's letter to his parents, September 25th 1956, APJV: "As to what to say to Mgr Roy, I shall send it at the end of the week for I want to talk to Fr Marie-Do. about it and I am to see him on Friday."

6. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, November 6th, 1957, APJV.

in October 1956¹, then sharing the Philippe family's privacy and reporting Fr Dehau's *ultima verba* to his parents. It is with M.-D. Philippe that the argumentation for Mgr Roy's sake as to Jean's priestly ordination is elaborated². It is after exchanges with him that the project of the construction of a house in Fatima is envisaged³. The exchanges between the two also bear on questions of health⁴ and on the school orientation of Michel Vanier, enlisted in a Fribourg high school in 1957⁵. In March 1960, J. Vanier drives M.-D. Philippe to Bouvines again for him to see his mother⁶. In April 1961, M.-D. Philippe preaches at Bernard Vanier's (very discreet) wedding – "a very moving sermon, or rather a few short words, very moving in their simplicity"⁷.

The correspondence between J. Vanier and M.-D. Philippe, however, consists of three letters only. Two of them are to be found in the "NFA" file (1958-1959); the third, dated September 1976 and included in a "sacerdoce" [priesthood] file, was sent through an irony of history from a chalet names "L'Eau vive" in Briançon.

M.-D. Philippe's first letter to J. Vanier is written on the very day of Pope John XXIII's election, October 28th, 1958. Pius XII having died on October 9th, the Conclave elects Cardinal Roncalli who, to general surprise, takes the name of John XXIII. The news is welcome in the milieu of former members of L'Eau vive, since Roncalli had visited the premises when he was papal nuncio in Paris. In M.-D. Philippe's letter,

1. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, October 21st, 1956, APJV: «I was so pleased to render service to P. Marie-Do who was pleased to pray near P. Dehau.»

2. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, October 21st, 1956, APJV: «I enclose a paper – shown to M.-Do- about what could be said to Mgr Roy.»

3. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, December 29th, 1956, APJV: «Fr Marie-Dominique is here at the moment. It is very good to have him here for a few days. He wanted to be here for the feast of St John. I am very moved by his kindness and affection. We have talked about the immediate future. I have a strong urge – coming from God, I believe – to go to Fatima.»

4. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, March 4th, 1957, APJV.

5. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, March 4th, 1957, APJV: «For Michel – do not worry – just follow Fr Marie-Do's advice as to the cantonal school.» J. Vanier's letter to his parents, March 22nd, 1957, APJV: «Fr M.-Do thinks that it will be very good for Michel to go to Fribourg – so I think you may be assured and confident.»

6. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, March 5th, 1960, p. 4, APJV.

7. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, April 7th, 1961, APJV.

T. Philippe is designed as “solitary Jean”, Jean being his second Christian name. J. Vanier is probably designed as “the Paris Jean”. The “papers” referred to are rough copies of the Ph.D.

thesis, which M.-D. Philippe supervises from afar. The latter is then on his way between Fribourg, Paris and the Dominican nuns’ community at Langeac. As to the telegram that M.-D. Philippe is expecting, we can observe the presence of a coding device on the signature: “J or Mary”. Being similar to the “NFA” code, the device invites us to consider that M.-D. Philippe, though not a member of the group of “tout-petits”, gravitates at its immediate border and shares some of its traits of communication. In the letter, M.-D. Philippe gives news of various “friends” without our being able to pinpoint the identity of each. Here is the full text:

October 28th

Dearest,

Thank you for your note and your prayers.

Do take a rest, a good one.

We must pray a lot for John XXIII... how strange! Let the M. H. (MostHoly) Virgin enlighten and guide him! This will touch the other John a lot, Jean le solitaire. As to the Paris Jean, he must be exulting! And your father will be happy!

I have not had the time to read your papers yet. I am late for I had too much urgent work. But I will try to find some time.

I am normally leaving Paris for Langeac on October 31st in the evening. I shall probably be in Langeac on the 1st and 2nd... to be back in Paris on Nov. 3rd in the morning (6:30). Weren’t you supposed to come back to Paris?... If you come back on the 2nd, do let me know... I can meet you up on the way...in Valence... or Lyon. But I must be here on the 3rd by 10 a.m... Perhaps it is not too convenient! You would have to send a telegram to Langeac (St Catherine’s monastery) or to Paris on Friday night. I shall be at Dr Vidal’s till 10 p.m. Just sign “J” – that will be sufficient – or “Marie”.

Pray for me. You have time, don’t you? Nothing much new here. I am still on the soul. It is very rich and very beautiful! At least for me, for it explains all the vast confusions about that problem.

See you soon. Please believe in my affection [illegible word]. Do live full on his [her? French possessives agree with the object, i.e. with the illegible noun here] love. Faithfully and fervently.

Fr MD

P.S. I am happy that you saw André. Good Mario must be in Frib. At the moment, with Valéry [Valérie] – I think. Be prudent with Jean-Noël D. and at the same time very gentle for he must be suffering...

H. McDonald has just returned. He would be happy to see you again.

The second letter dates from June 11th, 1959. J. Vanier is installed by then in his house in Fatima, Portugal. We once more observe the stakes behind the thesis: “Will according to Aristotle, the publication of articles in connection with the research. M.-D. Philippe seems to have little time to spare to write out comments on J. Vanier’s work. Once again, we can observe the coding and dissimulating device used in relation to Fr Dehau, whose works are circulating underground. Concerning an article by the latter [“P. D.” in the letter], M.-D. Philippe writes: “I am supposed not to know about it”, “don’t say that you have shown it to me”. On June 11th, he is not informed yet that the Holy Office has already lifted his condemnation. He receives the news of his rehabilitation on June 17th only¹. In Rome at the end of May, M.-D. Philippe has also met his brother, whom he designs without the code (“N”) used within the group of the “tout-petits”. This is a marker: M.-D. Philippe is very close to the “NFA” sect, he shares many of their traits, but he is not part of it, only at the immediate border.

Dearest Jean,

Thank you for your prayers and everything you are telling me. I am happy that you can at last be “at home” in that blessed place [Fatima]... I don’t know when I’ll be able to come!... You should ask permission from the Rime [Révérentissime = Most Reverend] Master general for me to come and bless your “abode”, your hermitage... Is it wise to ask this from him for the moment? See that with Mary, so as to combine prudence with audacity and hope! I am entrusting to Mary what you are telling me about your father – that she may enlighten him! As Gov. gen., is he entitled to a private chaplain?

1. M.-D. Philippe’s letter to the Master general, June 17th, 1959, AGOP.

As for P.D.'s article, I am officially supposed not to know about it, for I am not sure that in Rome Fr Paul [Paul Philippe of the Holy Office] would really agree to see it published. I don't know where this comes from. Don't say that you have shown it to me.

The [Gounauds? hardly legible name] were very moved by the cheque, coming from Fatima. Poor things! It is hard. Dr Elivy from Berne is taking care of the child... he keeps some hope but does not hide it from me how serious it is... I prefer to know that Dr Elivy is dealing with it, far he is here, quite close.

Concerning the work on βούλησις, I could have a look at it with Jean-Noël here before Christmas and have it published – we shall see under what name. The RT [*Revue thomiste*] or the RSPT [*Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*] would probably publish such articles!

But I think it very well to write some to enlighten a little.

You should also show that taking the union of body and soul as “speculative” and then “practice” (*Ethics*) enables to explain those false oppositions between *De Anima* and *Ethics*.

On June 22nd, young Colette Pattyn is getting married in Paris. I'll say Mass. An uncle from “the other side” will bless the marriage. Please entrust her to the M.H. (Most Holy) Virgin.

I shall probably leave Frib. on July 3rd. When are *you* leaving Fatima? Mario would like to take Valéry [Valérie] to Fatima and then to Marthe R. [Robin]'s. When are you going back? Both [girls] are well. Pray for them. Let it be a little home all theirs [reading difficult, exact sense?] – these are the two intentions [uncertain word] of their hearts. Christophe, Mario's brother, is getting married on the 21st.

You know how united I am to you in his Love.

Fr MD

PS. I went to Rome on May 22nd. I saw Fr Th. [Thomas] who asked me to tell you of his union of prayer. I hope you'll be able to see him soon!! I saw Fr. P [probably Paul Philippe] at length, happy, + and + (more and more) influent.

1. The last three names are those of some of M.-D. Philippe's friends: Mario von Ledebur-Wicheln, an Austrian aristocrat who followed his philosophy course in Fribourg, his wife, Valérie von Altenbourg – the wedding takes place on July 20th, 1959. His brother is Christophe von Ledebur-Wicheln.

The third of M.-D. Philippe's letters to J. Vanier kept in the APJV is dated September 9th, 1976. The then context is that of the refusal of J. Vanier's priestly ordination by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The two men have met at the Paris airport, just before this long 8-page letter was written. M.-D. Philippe is coming back in writing on their exchange and to the basic subject. He is approving of the “so evangelical reaction” of the Bishop of Beauvais, Mgr Stéphane Desmazières. He “cannot understand” the position of the Roman Congregation, which judges “a present situation on the virtually exclusive basis of a decree taken more than twenty years ago now! But I do not want to judge. I entrust it all to Jesus and Mary.” Reading the letter is an opportunity to look back on the path traveled:

I remember our meeting in December 1956, after the Holy office had asked you to leave L'Eau vive and you had gone to Bellefontaine, when we tried to discern what the Holy Spirit requested from you. Considering the outside circumstances and more deeply your inner appeals, it seemed very clear that you should not be incardinated in the Quebec diocese as foreseen, but remain free in expectation, so as to be able to do what Jesus would ask you to do.

The passage is capital and confirms what we perceived: it is with M.-D. Philippe that J. Vanier is discerning the common requirement, recalled by the Holy Office in 1956, to attend a seminary before ordination. This would have been a way out, and perhaps a liberation, for him. It is with M.-D. Philippe that he makes the decision not to follow that path. And the latter continues, *a posteriori* defending the wisdom of this choice:

Little by little, the work to which Jesus intended you has become clearer. L'Arche seems to me to be an achievement and with L'Arche He made you radiate... retreats, personal contacts. What you have done and are doing is the work of mercy towards the poorest and the humblest of our world. This is exactly what the Holy Spirit requires from our Church these days: to be the Church of the poor, to be close to the poorest. You have done that in a great evangelical purity, without any political compromise. Secular people are perhaps more apt than priests to achieve such work.

This revisiting of the creation of L'Arche – a work of mercy, “the work for which Jesus intended you”, the being set into motion by the

Holy Spirit, the Church of the poor, etc. – must again be placed here in the perspective of the de-clericalisation of the Church and the complementarity between clerics and laymen. M.-D. Philippe *in fine* recommends J. Vanier to remain a layman, to give up his desire of becoming a priest, not to abandon L'Arche, not to try to “defend himself against Rome”.

It all seems clear to me. You must remain faithful to your prime vocation. You cannot abandon L'Arche. Becoming a priest abandoning L'Arche seems an error. [...] Remain what you are for the time being and develop that work of God in the sense of a broader evangelical mercy. It is so much this testimony that our modern world needs. This seems capital to me, dear Jean. This is why I am telling you in such clear-cut manner.

The conclusion and the final *Nota bene* of the letter are extremely significant:

It is always harsh to be wounded inside by one's Mother, the Holy Church, by her instruments. But this is the way the Holy Spirit gives us a more divine love for her. Please pray for me. Thank you. Fr M.-D. Philippe

N.B. I apologize for the length of this letter. But I believe it necessary to set the record straight. And then there is also Fr Th. His present situation, in which he can live his apostolic life to such good use to the present Church, must not be revisited, so it seems to me.

Probably prudently, but also perhaps unconsciously, the *Nota bene* indicates M.-D. Philippe's line of arguments. The stability now obtained by T. Philippe thanks to J. Vanier and the work of L'Arche must not be compromised by swirls caused J. Vanier's questioning about his priestly vocation, which would certainly raise some questions from the Roman authorities. One must remain as much as possible beneath the radars.

The Vanier parents and M.-D. Philippe

J. Vanier's parents, who are corresponding with the Dominican at the beginning of the 1960s are also part of the relation between the two men. The Vaniers' first encounter with M.-D. Philippe seems to date

back to the Summer of 1956¹. Letters that have not been retrieved date from the Autumn of the same year².

The heart of the matter is to know how much J. Vanier's parents knew about the L'Eau vive affairs. From what is documented at present, we may say that they were acquainted with T. Philippe's condemnation by the Holy Office³, that they support him morally and financially⁴ and that they share the perspective of the “slandered saint”, condemned for doctrinal reasons– without knowing the detail of the canonical criminal trial or suspecting that M. -D. Philippe is also condemned between 1957 and 1959. The correspondence indirectly illustrates the silences and the way the information is compartmented within the Philippe brothers' close circle. The register of the correspondence is that of piety, devotion, union of prayer. The letters, intimate, from members of a same family, pious, quite often rather anecdotal as to their content, reveal a friendly relation but also a genre in letter-writing. Several remarks are also to be found in them on T. Philippe and L'Arche, which would be “the realization of the Holy Spirit's most intimate moanings”⁵.

In M.-D. Philippe's first letter, dated October 17th, 1962, shortly after J. Vanier defended his theses, we can thus read:

On returning to the Albertinum in Fribourg, after a whole series of sermons preached over the holiday season, I am receiving the announcement of Michel's wedding. Jean had already told me about it – you know how closely I unite with your joy and thanksgiving. How well Providence leads everything with maternal love – so hidden, so invisible at some moments,

1. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, August 15th, 1956, APJV. In the letter to his parents of October 27th, he clearly refers to their encounter with M.-D. Philippe: “He was very happy of his conversation with you and your letter.”

2. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, September 25th, 1956, APJV: “Yes I received your letters for P. M.-Do and gave them to him.”

3. J. Vanier's letter to his parents, June 12th, 1956, APJV. In this letter, these are the reasons he gives for the closing down of l'Eau vive : “faithfulness to Fr Thomas and Fr Dehau”, but without any connection with T. Philippe's public teachings or writings.

4. Georges Vanier's petition to John XXIII in favour of T. Philippe, March 7th, 1959, ACDF: Georges Vanier asks from John XXIII a grace “of mercy” for T. Philippe. See also vol. 22, Fonds Vanier, BAC.

5. M.-D. Philippe's letter to Georges Vanier, January 15th [1966 or 1967], volume 27, Fonds Vanier, BAC.

yet always so attentive. Jean's presence with you gave you great joy. Here again the action of Providence is so obvious and so strong. I hope that his thesis can be published soon. It would be well for it is very good. You also had the joy to have Bernard, his wife and the little ones with you. Here again, God's action is obvious. Please give them my deep affection. I hope that you are well, that your health does not give you too much trouble. I hope above all that the Holy Spirit and the M. H. (Most Holy) Virgin are more and more present to keep you in the Love of Jesus' Heart. Today I am especially asking Jesus' most sacred Heart to take us all into his love. This our time of the Council demands such a call on his Love. The Holy Spirit is so thirsty of giving itself, of imparting all his Love. We must let it do its work within the Church of God. You know my deep union of prayer and all my great affection in His and in Mary's Heart.

Fr M.-D. Philippe

When you see Michel, please be kind enough to give him my congratulations and all my faithful affection¹.

In his answer, Georges Vanier thanks him profusely and gives him more personal news:

My wife and I were very moved by your letter of October 17th. We heartily thank you for your congratulations and for the good wishes you are expressing for the happiness of the young couple.

The wedding was not a solemn one. The nuptial benediction was given in the strict privacy of the family circle, in the chapel of the Governor general's residence, without any invitation but to a few close relations. The father nevertheless points out:

One of our great joys was Jean's presence. [...] Jean's successful defense of his thesis gave us joy. We really did not expect such a remarkable success.

Bernard Vanier is also present, with wife and children. "They are still deeply grateful personally, for all that you did for them". Georges Vanier finally concludes with a few details on his own health and on God's good will to him².

1. M.-D. Philippe's letter to Georges Vanier, October 17th, 1962, volume 26, Fonds Vanier, BAC.

2. Georges Vanier's letter to M.-D. Philippe, October 30th, 1962, volume 26, Fonds Vanier, BAC.

The third letter, dating from January 1963, is answering a Christmas card. M.-D. Philippe mentions a pilgrimage to Lourdes, his passage at the Cognac Carmel, gives news about his health, his family, T. Philippe, etc.:

Thank you for your Christmas and New Year wishes. I ended my year 52 on December 31st at the Lourdes "grotto" and on January 1st, after attending Mgr Théas's mass, we recited a rosary at the grotto, to be near Her. You know that I did not forget you there. Christmas was at the Cognac Carmel, a little delightful Carmel that you would enjoy tremendously, and I did not forget you there either. On my way back from those various sermons, I am finding your lovely Christmas card. From Jean, I heard all about you, of your health, Bernard, Michel. How close the Lord is, to lead us. I received a note from Rome – Fr T. is most especially requesting prayers for new decisions will probably be made by the new General. May the T.S.V. [très sainte Vierge] be present and arrange everything softly for one can feel how vulnerable he is. A life of sufferings makes one more vulnerable¹.

Letters become rarer and often are a simple Christmas card after that. The Vanier parents are very occupied with the official functions. Though less intense, the connection remains and evidences the exchanges with Canada and underline the development of L'Arche. Thus a letter of December 1965:

Thank you for your faithful card and wishes. Yes, you know, I am not forgetting you here and am praying for you. May the Lord and his sweet Mother help and keep you, drawing you more and more to Them! I have several Canadians among my students. This too is another little sign yet! – reminding of a deep union. I regularly have news from Trosly... from l'Arche. I know how everything is good, hidden and given to Jesus and his Mother. This is essential. I hope that your health is good and that everything is well. Most deeply united in his Love, please believe in my strong friendship. Fr M.-D. Philippe².

The last letter, sent from Fribourg, dates from January 1966 or 1967, the year of Georges Vanier's death:

1. M.-D. Philippe's letter to Georges Vanier, January 12th [January 1963], volume 27, Fonds Vanier, BAC.

2. M.-D. Philippe's letter to Georges Vanier, December 20th, 1965, volume 26, Fonds Vanier, BAC.

Thank you for your good wishes and prayers... I apologize for answering so late, but I have been overworked during the Christmas holidays and upon returning now found loads of work waiting. You know my wishes for you... for your children, whom I love so dearly, those that I know and those that I don't. You know how faithful my prayer is. Yes, may the Holy Spirit help you Love in accordance with all the intensity of the Love of Jesus' Heart, in Him and for Him! May Mary give you that deep and simple meekness towards the Holy Spirit! She is so deeply our Mother – the Mother of the Church. Yes, I pray her hard for you.

You have the joy to have Jean with you. What he is doing is so good and so great... I believe that that this is indeed the realization of the inner moanings of the Holy Spirit – He who so much inhabits the poor! You know how united I am to your prayer for him. I have heard how he was celebrated on February 27th. He must have been very happy! Doubly so!

I shall go to Jerusalem at Easter, to preach the Benedictines' retreat. I am very happy about it. I do hope to see you if you come over to France in July! Please believe, dear friends in Jesus' and Mary's hearts, in my deep union of prayer. Very soon in Him. Fr M.-D. Philippe¹.

“Didier” as nucleus of the sectarian group?

How does M.-D. Philippe appear in the letters exchanged between Anne de Rosambo, Jacqueline d'Halluin and T. Philippe? What is his stance as to the group of the “tout-petits”? In the “NFA” correspondences, he is often designed as “Didier” or more simply as “Did”, for an unknown reason. Is it because of the vague assonance between “Did” and “Marie-Do”? Or is it a precise allusion to an event in St Didier's life, or to a place called Saint-Didier? Nobody knows. A codename, however, is required, since, in the milieu hostile to L'Eau vive, M.-D. Philippe is held as the “nucleus” of the cell².

1. M.-D. Philippe's letter to Georges Vanier, January 15th [1966 ou 1967], volume 27, Fonds Vanier, BAC.

2. Jacqueline d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, 2 p., undated [between July 1956 and July 1959], APJV : “He has seen Mimi [Marise?] who told him about her latest interview with Norb. [Norbert Tannhof]. He is sure that what Fr Ducat. disait (they are not submissive because they are too submissive) comes from Norb. Who assured Mimi that Did was the nucleus.”

A “NEW SHARING” BETWEEN THE TWO BROTHERS?

The relationships between the Philippe brothers are not easy to grasp. Between 1952 and 1963, the two of them naturally exchange letters and meet. M.-D. Philippe goes to Italy several times to visit his elder brother, who is also his godfather. We notice their closeness, their sense of family indeed, and a stalwart defense of T. Philippe by his brother in the name of family ties¹. But in T. Philippe's letters to J. Vanier, we observe a paradoxical invitation to both confidence in prudence with M.-D. Philippe.

For T. Philippe – this is our interpretation – the aim is to draw a second circle that is not the one of the “initiate” properly speaking, but of the “close” friends and supporters. A circle of confidence, but in which not everything, however, is said. Members of the first circle share a “hidden” life”, whereas those of the second represent “public”, apostolic life in the form of sharing the tasks that T. Philippe wishes for. What was M.-D. Philippe thinking of their “sharing”? Was he consenting to it? We do not know the answer. It is not unlikely that for T. Philippe it may only have been a mental representation. We here wish to quote a few fragments from his letters to J. Vanier, which we shall introduce *a minima*.

In a letter of 1958, it would seem that for J. Vanier, the observation of discretion [the object of which is not defined here] does not apply to M.-D. Philippe or to his own parents:

Except on indications from the Good Lord and indication anyth. bt. ttly. providential... we must be very discreet with those that the Holy Spirit himself does not introduce int; this qte hidden life... of course, none of this concerns Did., to whom you can, I think, do some good. It is also qte different with your parents, for them those precisions can be very useful on occasion...²

1. On this point, we must quote a letter from Pierre Philippe, their brother, sent to the Holy Office Commissioner on July 3rd 1956: “I find it hard to pardon M.-D. who, it seems to me, has rooted in the myth of slander and hostility, which now closes down the minds”, 513/55, ACDF. In document 268, 214 / 52 (ACDF): a woman testifying “also thinks that Fr M.-Dominique believes in what he thinks is a reality and he has done more harm than good to his brother by defending him at all costs.”

2. T. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, undated [first half of 1958], APJV.

A few months later, in the Summer of 1959, T. Philippe asks J. Vanier not to put “Did” in the confidence, so as not to arouse questions., unless this proves “necessary”:

I think that you may tell Marise and Marg. (under the seal of secrecy) that you hope to be able to come and meet me and offer them to take their letters, I think it would be well, you could already tell Marise about your intention, so that she might write in advance if the Good Lord inspires her. I think it preferable not to tell others... same for Did, so that he should not ask himself questions, unless this seems obviously necessary or preferable¹...

During the Spring of 1960, T. Philippe seems to have a precise intuition of the role of each – J. Vanier playing a middle, and vague (as must be said) part between the two brothers. He appears with a hybrid status, both in the “hidden life” and in the “public life”, as tout:

It is in the Father’s [desire] that two brothers should know such a [littleness] and [meekness] so intimately – I felt it very strongly for Did. And it seems to me that it is like a confirmation. I told it to Did. That there was here like a [new] sharing, more public life for him and even more hidden life for me; I was telling him that you were in between the two, bt I think the Fr General’s attitude is an indication that, as for our actual relationships, they should remain more in the sphere of the hidden life. I think Did will have to [...] bt without knowing the frequency or the modalities. Bt Jesus perhaps desires – and as if better to hide this hidden life – a [diff.] public life that would seem not to have anything to do with me... either an intellectual and doctrinal apostolate, or a more direct apostolate, the one being able to serve as an instrument for the other... and Jesus will perhaps want to use you to lead souls to N. in a very small nbr.; [...] – in a mst exceptional way, as [poor sinners] most loved by Jesus or as tt-petits².

What also transpires from T. Philippe’s letters to J. Vanier is that, despite the distance and his solitude, he continues to spiritually direct a certain number of people together with his brother:

I am only adding a word to the letter I had written to you. I wrote a long letter to Did yesterday and have just sent it to Bouvines concerning little Alix [or Alex]. I too felt that the poor girl could not be left in such a state,

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, end of June or beginning of July 1959, APJV.

2. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, Spring 1960, APJV.

I did not know that she was in such a distressed state, bt. I did think she was ready to follow Jesus in his hidden life... And I wrote to Did in that sense... I do not know if he is in Bouvines at the moment, but my mother, I hope, will forward it... It is perhaps good that you should know...¹

J. Vanier appears as someone being led, T. Philippe’s student or even “steward”, that is to say in a sense as the pivot of the group of the latter’s correspondents. In this fragment, letters for “Did” are mentioned, as well as meetings with “Did”:

Just a lttl note to entrust you with the letters for Did., Marg. And Pi. and to tell you how much I remain with you. Many thanks again for all you do for Jesus’ and Mary’s tt-petits, for Pi and Pa especially, bt also for little Ger. [Gerry] and the others... I do entrust your thesis, and all the interv. you will have with that [illegible word], with Did, Canon L., de Monl... You must alws. go as Jesus’ little envoy, most humble bt qut simple when Jesus cares to use him to mete out a little of the truths of love that he taught him in secret².

Concerning M.-D. Philippe’s interview with the Master general at the end of May 1959, which also coincides with a passage of Jacqueline d’Halluin and Anne de Rosambo in Rome, we can read an attempt at the definition of J. Vanier’s role as “go-between”:

A v. short note to tell you how united to you I am. I feel that we mst pray a lt so that all goes well to Mary’s pleasure. Pi and Pa will give you short news about Did’s visit. I think everything went well according to God’s design.

I think that Did has felt yet much more deeply your providential role as intermediate between him and N. and that it was one of the major benefits of that visit. The Fr Gen. asked him to turn more and more towards theology (because of the Council I believe) and I very clearly told Did that the Good Lord was asking me to more and more sacrifice my life as a theologian at the s. time as he was enlightening me more and more... and that from both of us He required some [illegible words] sacrifice and some [illegible words] to accept two lives practically very different from the outside, bt that must remain united more than ever. I told him that you would be our go-between fr many things, to have notes typed, classify them and give them to him... I think that fr other things too, you will be

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, mid-August 1961, APJV. In the context, the person referred to does not seem to be Alix Parmentier.

2. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, during Lent some time between 1960 and 1962, APJV.

called upon to act as go-between. Fr the time being, let us pray a ltl so as to discern what the Good Lord may desire... I believe that you must be v. prudent with the Fr General, perhaps tell him that you have worked a ltl with Did for the commt of Aristotle and that you now mean to start on an in-depth study of St Thomas and the theology of the Church... The Fr Gen. asked Did to write him a note on speculative theology in view of the Council and Did asked me to pass him on a fw notes... Could you retrieve all that is relevant to this in the note that Pi typed...¹

In the last lines here, we can observe the functioning pattern of the whole chain before the Council: the Master general at the helm, M.-D. Philippe solicited for his competence, creative T. Philippe solicited by his brother, J. Vanier as go-between and Anne de Rosanbo as typist of the “little notes”.

“DID” IN PI’S AND PA’S LETTERS

“Did” appears very little in Anne de Rosanbo’s letters to J. Vanier. Only three discreet and insignificant references to him are to be found in the thirty-five letters exchanged:

M.b.c.pet.min. [mon bien cher petit minou = darling little pussy of mine], I am receiving yr good letter today, together with Did’s. I am very moved that you sent it so directly! I am going to forward it to Pa [Jacqueline d’Halluin] by the sfsm. [selfsame] mail².

A few days later, she writes again:

Pa has shown me a little Mary de La Salette that was given to her. She means to go there shortly, it seems (Maybe Did will be in the region?)³.

The last occurrence associates “Did” and his whole family with the Pope’s prayer⁴. Nothing much may be concluded from those three

1. T. Philippe’s letter to J. Vanier, end of May or June 1959, APJV.

2. A. de Rosanbo’s letter to J. Vanier, July 6th, 1959, APJV.

3. A. de Rosanbo’s letter to J. Vanier, Thursday July 9th, 1959, APJV.

4. A. de Rosanbo’s letter to J. Vanier, July 31st or August 7th, 1959, APJV: “Bien ch. pet. min. Jr. [Bien cher petit minou Jérémie], Card. Ot. [Ottaviani] bein in Amer. It is Papi [Paul Philippe] who sees J. [John] XXIII each Thursday. Papi has said to N [T. Philippe] that J. XXIII seems to konw him inside out, that he (the Pope) promised him (N) his prayers and that he (N) is asking to pray for him, that he very affectionately N. Did, his parents and all his ordained brs. and sis. [brothers and sisters]”.

occurrences, except that there is a whole traffic of correspondence [nor found] between Anne de Rosanbo and M.-D. Philippe; that Jacqueline d’Halluin wishes to meet up with him and that John XXIII strongly associates the two Philippe brothers, Thomas and Marie-Dominique.

Reversely, Jacqueline d’Halluin’s letters to J. Vanier are much more complex and explicit as to “Pa’s” encounters with “Did”. Reading the letters, the contacts are frequent and intimate, and the relations are sexual. As already indicated in the chapter devoted to the correspondences, we must – without stumbling on the double obstacle of the letter material and the psychology of the letter writer – call on other testimonies¹.

Jacqueline d’Halluin’s letters make it appear clearly that M.-D. Philippe plays the part of a counselor in the group gathered around T. Philippe, without being its “nucleus” in the proper sense, since the group, in Italy especially, seems to hide from him. A fine chronology of the relation is hard to establish, except for the 1958-1959 sequence. M.-D. Philippe often comes by Jacqueline d’Halluin’s flat, for she serves him as secretary and types “little notes” for him. She knows Alix Parmentier. We shall again quote a few fragments of Jacqueline d’Halluin’s letters to J. Vanier relative to “Did”, without too much glossing. For instance, a letter of 1954:

Following your letter, we could meet up with Did who was passing through Paris on Sunday night between 8 and 11 p.m. He was coming from [Vernon?] and going on to Grenoble. We could talk to him. He called Charles [unidentified. Could it be Dr. Thompson?] (he had seen him two days before and Charles had talked to him about Étienne [= N. = T. Philippe] spontaneously saying it would be good for him to stay a while at his parents’ since he had not seen them for 3 years...), so he telephoned to hasten the project. [...] We talked about N.’s return = that you could drive him back [from Corbara where T. Philippe then is]. He strongly advised against it (this can be associated with the present event at L’E. v. and attract heavy criticism. It is perhaps better for you to come back alone (with the

1. On Jacqueline d’Halluin’s role, see chapter 7, and read Michèle-France Pesneau, *L’emprise*, Golias, 2020, p. 102 : “At that time I renewed ties with Fr Marie-Dominique, whom I saw in Paris about once a month, except during the Summer, in a flat belonging to Jacqueline, who was in charge of La Ferme. That flat was used by Fr Thomas as the place for his rendez-vous. It served me to meet Fr Marie-Dominique in Paris.”

others from L'E. v.) and show up before N.'s return. B. Lax might perhaps remain with N. until about the days of his departure, so that he is not alone, to drive him to the plane. [...] Did will be in Verneuil ("Abbaye de St Nicolas, Verneuil/Avre, near Dreux, Eure") Frid., Sat. and Sun.¹.

A letter of 1958 permits to assess again that "Bouvines" is the stronghold of the Philippe family:

I received a note from Did saying h was going to Bouv. [Bouvines] and would come back through P. [Paris] again on the 15th... He was not saying if he was coming up to here! I sent a short note to Bouv. to invite him. Let it all be up to Mary's b.p. [pleasure]. I advanced a lot in his work at the beginning of the week, enough for him to come and pick it up! But I also leave some, for he will otherwise bring me some more².

And at the end of the same year:

I unfortunately cannot make it on the 21st and 22nd [December 1958], that is to say Sunday and Monday, for Did is passing through Paris and will probably pay me a little visit to give me news from R.³

Jacqueline d'Halluin and Anne de Rosanbo are in Rome at the end of May 1959 and so is M.-D. Philippe, though without any previous concertation with the two women, with whom he nevertheless seems to exchange letters at times. Seeking his rehabilitation, he meets the Master general of his Order. He also meets his brother Thomas at the Frattochie Trappe. Reading the letters, it seems that the "tout-petits" wish to act secretly, without his knowing.

Last Friday [May 22nd, 1959], the day we saw N., Did arrived from Fribourg to see him. Fortunately, N. had returned to his room 5 minutes before. M. [Mary] is really watching over us. *Deo Gratias!* Did was having some problems with other frs at the Albertinum and the Gen called him. This is rather a good sign⁴.

No news from Did. This leads me to think that he must have seen me with Mam Pi on the road to Frat. [Frattochie]. He must have arrived by the

1. J. d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, end of 1954, APJV.

2. J. d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, 1958, APJV. The letter begins with: "B. C. J., This Wednesday, I have just received the letter you posted yesterday and I am greeting you with 'a saintly kiss'."

3. J. d'Halluin's letter to Anne de Rosanbo, December 15th, 1958, APJV.

4. J. d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, May 24th, 1959, APJV.

coach as we were walking down the road to catch ours. The times coincided, but for a few minutes' gap...¹

No news from Did. He must have sent me news from R. [Rome] in Fat. [Fatima]. If you get some, I'll be very happy to have them, for the Good Lord strongly unites to my little foreign kittens (Italian, Swiss and my little Portuguese kitten) and small news do me good²

This morning I am receiving a short note from Did, who is coming back to Paris to marry his niece on the 22nd (June 1959³). He will probably⁴ come to see me on the 23rd.

On June 21st, Did and Pa meet. Jacqueline d'Halluin is perfectly aware of the censorship weighing on "Did" and "Jer":

Just a quick note. I have had a short visit from Did and I don't want to wait till I tell you the news...: he has been given back his ministry. He went to see the Gen. in Rome and on that occasion told him that if this situation were to last, he would prefer to retire in a Trappe to pray... The threat proved efficient since the Gen. was writing a week later to say that all his permissions were granted back to him. He has not received the official papers yet, but the thing is done. M. [Mary] must be thanked so much for this grace. He also thinks that for you the situation will be unlocked pretty soon, the two things being somewhat connected...⁵.

The little group lives in the hope and expectation of the "unlocking" of J. Vanier's canonical situation. The news, transmitted by Jacqueline d'Halluin, is as secret as that of the condemnation had been:

And suddenly by 3:30 p.m. two little pulls on the bell ring to tell me something. It was Did coming to pay me a little visit. He had been examining students at Le Saulchoir and he had time to spare before going to see de Monl. [de Monléon]. I was so happy! He was coming just like that! Without a warning!... [...] Yes, you may tell Did that I told you he had recovered all the powers. You may add: 'and she said not to tell anybody', but I think that as far as we are concerned, it won't go any further⁶..

1. J. d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, end of May 1959, APJV

2. J. d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, May 31st, 1959, APJV.

3. Jacqueline d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, June 5th, 1959, APJV.

4. See above M.-D. Philippe's letter to J. Vanier, June 11th, 1959. The wedding is Colette Pattyn's.

5. Jacqueline d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, June 1959, APJV.

6. Jacqueline d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, June 29th, 1959, APJV.

Jacqueline d'Halluin continues to work for M.-D. Philippe: "Did has given me some work again¹"; she often receives news². All the same, the relationships between M.-D. Philippe and Jacqueline d'Halluin are not simple. We can observe a kind of fatigue and dissatisfaction on her part (existential, sentimental and sexual):

I wish you came here from time to time for a little visit. But here comes Did! I never get to have the good one!... Well, I'll switch off the light and perhaps it will be the same in the dark...³

In a letter of 1961, Jacqueline d'Halluin explains that she cannot get to sleep; she takes sleeping pills, but this is not sufficient; She writes:

The good solution *is* what I was thinkg.: that a good little kitten should come and night-night with me. I had a visit from Did last night until 9:30 (he arrived at 8:30) and, after a little prayer, I went to sleep around midnight like a tiny little girl⁴..

But "Did" never comes often enough. "It is the 3rd time we have seen him in 7 months. It isn't much⁵, it isn't!"

Conclusion

It is thus obvious that the links between J. Vanier and M.-D. Philippe are extremely tight right from the beginning of the 1960s, that those ties include the Vanier and the Philippe families in a broader sense and that they are reinforced at the moment of T. Philippe's condemnation and the dispersion of L'Eau vive. Those links have to do with spiritual and intellectual direction and they involve what André Malraux calls "a little heap of secrets", which the documentation enables to perceive: T. Philippe, Thomas Dehau, the canonical sanctions, the women of L'Eau vive that pass on to L'Arche afterwards, etc. 1956 is the year

when the alliance is sealed, so to speak: the year of T. Philippe's condemnation is also the year when J. Vanier attends Fr Dehau's last moments and meets the parents of the Philippe brothers in Bouvines. It is also the one when J. Vanier's parents meet M.-D. Philippe. 1975 is the year of M.-D. Philippe's last retrieved letter: it is not the end of the story indeed, but it is evident that after the foundation of the Brothers of St John in 1975, the links, although apparently not coming loose, lose their closeness to become more institutional between the Brothers of St John and L'Arche.

As to spiritual direction, it appears that, on two occasions at least, in 1956 and 1976, M.-D. Philippe (unconsciously?) assigns the task to stay with T. Philippe to J. Vanier: no incardination, no durable training in a seminary so as to remain at L'Arche in the diocese of Quebec.

The documents that are both the most complex and the most precise are the letters of Jacqueline d'Halluin who, if we read her right, shares her bed with her three "little pussicats". There are several mentions of this in her letters to J. Vanier. The correspondences between the men are silent on that point.

This also lets us glimpse the multiplicity of those "heaps" of secrets: according to the present state of our historical knowledge, the Vanier parents know nothing of the *criminal* elements of the canonical trials; M.-D. Philippe, who knows a lot, does not know about the relationships among the "tout-petits". We must get rid of the simple vision of a secret vs. knowledge dichotomy and consider that there are several rooms in the house of secret.

1. Jacqueline d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, undated [July 1st, 1959], "NFA", APJV.

2. Jacqueline d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, November 25th, 1959, APJV.

3. Jacqueline d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, undated, APJV. The letter starts with : "My dearest little kitten" (typed).

4. Jacqueline d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, Friday, April 1961, APJV.

5. Jacqueline d'Halluin's letter to J. Vanier, undated [October 30th, 1961], "NFA", APJV.

PART 3

**Authority and governance
in Jean Vanier's L'Arche**

Translation : *Thomas Mc Donough*

Introduction

Claire Vincent-Mory

The mandate given to the Study Commission is an invitation to study “the modes of relationship between Jean Vanier and the members of L’Arche”. More particularly, it investigates the effects of these relational forms: How did it work? What is the impact on L’Arche today? ¹

Given the purpose of the Commission’s investigation, this focus raises a series of more specific questions: Did J. Vanier exert control over the members of L’Arche? Did he have a disproportionate power that allowed him to commit abuses? Is there a link between the nature of his authority in L’Arche, the practice of secrecy and the perpetration of sexual violence² in the organisation? The third part of the report explores several sociological avenues to answer these questions.

There are two parts that relate to J. Vanier’s authority in L’Arche: his participation in the government of the organisation (what exercise of power?); the strong and privileged interpersonal relationships he had with many members of the organisation³. These two sets are

1. See Study Commission presentation [URL] <http://www.arche-france.org/actualites/larche-internationale-constitue-commission-detudes-sur-son-fondateur>. Accessed on 7/11/2022.

2. Liz Kelly, “The *Continuum of Sexual Violence*”, *Cahiers du Genre*, no. 66, vol.1, 2019[1987], pp. 17-36.

3. The effectiveness of an action of authority can be based on the existence of institutions that represent it but also on the existence of a link between the adherent and the referent, that is to say between the two parties of the relationship of authority. Lobrichon Guy, “Autorité Religieuse”, in Régine Azria, Danielle Hervieu-Léger, Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Dictionnaire des faits religieux*, Paris, PUF, 2010, p.68.

closely intertwined. For the purposes of the analysis, they are dealt with separately in separate chapters.

Authority. A relational perspective

From the point of view of philosophy and of humanities and social sciences, authority¹ is neither an attribute nor an individual competence, but rather a relational register² :

“One only has authority over what can “react”. [...] The authoritarian act is distinguished from all others by the fact that it is not opposed by the person or persons to whom it is directed. [...] Authority is the possibility that an agent has to act on others (or on another), without the latter reacting to him, while being able to do so³.

The relational perspective of our analysis pays close attention to several dimensions. First of all, authority should not be reduced to, or confused with, coercion by force. One of the characteristics of J. Vanier's acts and speeches is precisely the absence of coercion, i.e. the use of physical or moral means to force another to act or speak in a certain way. Therefore – and this is the second dimension of our approach – we focus primarily on the discourses of individuals and on the reference documents of organisations, while remaining attentive to practices, i.e. to the actions of authority, to the concrete marks and devices of legitimisation and obedience to power.

Thirdly, we take into account the link between social asymmetries and authority relations, which invites us to pay particular attention to the exercise of persuasion⁴. Designating a vague set without

1. As Yves Cohen points out, if “French [...] has no equivalent for *leadership*, it is mainly in the semantic universe of the word *authority* that the role of the person finds formulation”. Following this author, we mainly use the terms “authority”, “chief” or “authority holder” to translate “leadership”, “leader”. Yves Cohen *Le siècle des chefs. A transnational history of command and authority (1890-1940)*, 2013, p.47; p.23.

2. *Ibid*, p.21.

3. Alexandre Kojève, *La notion de l'Autorité*, Paris, Gallimard, 2021 [1942] p.57-58.

4. Following other authors, we thus distance ourselves from Hannah Arendt's postulate that authority is distinguished not only from coercion permitted by the use of force, but also from persuasion permitted by the use of argumentative exercise. Hannah Arendt, “What is authority?”, *The Crisis of Culture*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972 [1959], p.221.

“theoretical consistency or descriptive framework”¹, persuasion can take the form of a conversational model capable of exerting pressure and obtaining the assent of others, particularly when the parties in conversation are caught in an asymmetrical relationship. Persuasion does not require the use of rational arguments or the assumed equality of the participants:

“The discourses of authority will first of all be those which have a great chance of being obeyed, believed or followed by effect. [...] More generally, discourses that present themselves as overarching or that claim to be endowed with additional legitimacy, guaranteeing a superior credibility, may be associated with it: the dissymmetry of the positions occupied is a central element and, whether it is a matter of hierarchical or symbolic superiority, whether it is sociologically established or simply posited and claimed, the high position of the speaker makes it possible to detach the authority itself from the more diverse and indistinct background of access to the legitimate word².”

Thus, the absence of expression of disagreement or the passive implementation of a decision taken by the authority holder does not necessarily imply a *conscious and voluntary decision on the part of the those obeying*. In this sense, any relationship of authority has the potential for excess, drift or abuse³.

Charismatic authority and its institutionalisation

Among the forms of authority, one in particular concerns our case study: the “charismatic” form, which we define following Yannick Fer by three characteristics: its personal dimension, independence from institutions, and the demonstration of a singular charisma – that is to say, a gift or an extra-ordinary quality⁴.

1. Claire Oger, *Faire référence. La construction de l'autorité dans le discours des institutions*, Paris, Editions de l'EHESS, 2021, p.25.

2. *Ibid*, p.49

3. *Ibid*, p.25.

4. Yannick Fer, “L'autorité ‘charismatique’ à l'épreuve du terrain : les formes de l'autorité en contexte pentecôtiste”, *L'année sociologique*, n°2, vol 71, 2021, p.480 We recall two obvious facts: “charismatic behaviour is not specific to the religious sphere” (Jean-Pierre Bastian, “De l'autorité prophétique chez les dirigeants Pentecôtistes”, *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse*, vol.81 n°2, 2001, p.192); the categories and the theological and sociological

In the wake of this sociologist, we study the relationship to institutions and the processes of institutionalisation. First of all, authority 'does not impose itself from the outset and always remains dependent on the social and institutional mechanisms¹ ' that establish it. Secondly, the providential, exemplary or uncommon character of the charismatic person is not enough to explain their capacity to attract disciples or supporters or their legitimate domination² . As Yannick Fer has pointed out, charisma is not some kind of "mysterious quality" or "religious capital independent of ordinary social determinations"³ .

Therefore, we examine the forms of J. Vanier's authority in L'Arche under several facets. We identify the personal virtues and gifts attributed to the authority holder by those who consent to him and account for the affective and emotional bond between them⁴ , without reducing his charismatic authority to prophetism and emotion. Furthermore, we take into account the social and institutional mechanisms that authorise, frame and shape charismatic authority. There is no strict opposition between charisma and institution, on the contrary: the case of J. Vanier in L'Arche shows the importance of the regulating (or deregulating) action of institutions holding authority. This expression refers to public, religious administrations, but also – for our study – to L'Arche. By participating in the regulation of careers, appointments (or "calls" or "interpellations"), by giving marks of recognition and validation of positions of authority, the processes of institutionalisation (of L'Arche in particular) play a decisive role in the processes of legitimisation of charismatic authority – which are therefore not simply personal, psychological, intuitive or mysterious.

conceptualisations of "charisma" and "charismatic" character are not superimposable

1. Yannick Fer, "L'autorité 'charismatique'...*op.cit.*, p.482.

2. "We call charisma the extraordinary quality [...] of a personage, who is, so to speak, endowed with supernatural or superhuman powers or characters, or at least outside of everyday life, inaccessible to ordinary mortals; or who is regarded as sent by God, or as an example, and consequently regarded as a 'leader'. Max Weber, *Sociologie des religions*, Paris, Gallimard, 1996 [1922], p.32.

3. Yannick Fer, "L'autorité 'charismatique'...*op.cit.*, p.480.

4. Enzo Pace, "Charisma", in Régine Azria, Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Dictionnaire des faits religieux*, *op.cit.*, p.130-131.

Chapters 10, 11 and 12 give a complementary account of the exercise of authority in L'Arche. Looking at the founding moment, the first chapter demonstrates that the meteoric success of L'Arche is due to a combination of ingredients, including an immediately ambitious strategy, anchored in the institutional frameworks of the medical-social field. Chapter 11 traces the formal institutionalisation of power at the community and federal levels. It reports on the way in which L'Arche and its partners authorised, shaped and legitimised charismatic authority, as practised by J. Vanier. Chapter 12 explores the relational configurations that link J. Vanier to the members in charge within L'Arche, in order to understand the basis of the belief in the legitimacy of his authority – and beyond that, of charismatic authority in L'Arche.

Taken together, these chapters show that such authority, without checks and balances, can give rise to and maintain power relations, opening the way to the exercise of many forms of abuse.

CHAPTER 10.
L'Arche, an ambitious project

Claire Vincent-Mory

“There is no model for this kind of community. [His plan was to simply live with Raphael and Philip, to weave a covenant with them. That’s how L’Arche started, without a plan. [...] It was really poor!”

Taken from the autobiographical book of Antoinette Maurice, the first assistant director of the Trosly community who assisted J. Vanier as director from 1970, these sentences are exemplary of the recurrent elements of language in the foundation myth: L’Arche would be the fruit of a humble and unprecedented initiative, without strategic ambition, economically precarious. Would the rapid growth, worldwide deployment and international recognition be the unforeseen fruits of an intimate and modest spiritual intuition? Many speeches about L’Arche (from founders, members, observers) emphasise that L’Arche is founded on faith (that is, from the believer’s point of view, trust in God), whose success would only be the consequence – and the best proof – of divine favour: men and women, following J. Vanier, would have chosen to bind their lives to excluded people, in poverty, humility and trust; the rest would have been given in addition. However effective it may be

1. Antoinette Maurice, *This wealth that comes from the poor: The beginnings of L’Arche as lived and told by Antoinette Maurice*. Internal document for L’Arche members. 2007, p.7, 24, 33.

from the point of view of mobilising resources (recruits, funding, prestige) and forming a collective identity, this providentialist discourse immediately comes into tension when we examine the birth process of the L'Arche project.

Chapter 7 provided a useful element for understanding the context in which L'Arche was born: already in December 1963, the set-up in Trosly-Breuil is carried by the whole group of "little ones", finally united around T. Philippe. The latter entrusted J. Vanier with the "future external set-up of Trosly", recommending that he rely on J. d'Halluin and A. de Rosambo for this purpose, and was pleased to "thus strengthen the links with [the] Préauts"¹. For the study group, this initial impetus given by T. Philippe raises an unavoidable question: how do the dynamics of the "little ones" contribute to the success of the L'Arche project?

This opening chapter of part three looks at the founding of L'Arche in order to understand the ingredients of its immediate and dazzling success. It shows that the experimental project took shape in the encounter between groups of people driven by heterogeneous utopias (1); but also that its rise is based on an immediate strategy of openness, organisational efficiency and insertion into the institutional medical-social frameworks of its time (2).

A utopian experience

Many descriptions of the utopian background of the L'Arche experience exist, both in the writings of J. Vanier, his biographies² and in scientific works³. The founder has long remained the main ideologue of the L'Arche project and the legitimate announcer of what the "gift" or "spirit" of L'Arche is. By his own admission, he drew on other community experiences that welcomed fragile people to figure out and guide the development of L'Arche. Indeed, from the 1930s onwards, many utopian experiments flourished in Europe and North America, such as

1. Letter from T. Philippe to J. Vanier, 5 December 1963, APJV

2. For example: Spink Kathryn, *The Miracle, The Message, The Story. J. Vanier and L'Arche*, Paulist Press, 2006.

3. For example: Cushing Pamela J., "Shaping the Moral Imagination of Caregivers: Disability, Difference & Inequality in L'Arche", PhD thesis, McMaster University, 2003.

the *Piccola Casa*, *Botton Village*, the *Village of the Poor*, *Dorothy Day's Houses of Hospitality*, the *Bethel* community in Germany and *The Catholic Worker*. However, beyond the discourse and inspiration of the founder of L'Arche, the ideals from which the L'Arche experience took shape were provided by the heterogeneous contributions of people in search of utopian communities. In the case of the L'Arche community in Trosly, these utopian aspirations can be grouped into three sets, which we present briefly¹.

CATHOLIC UTOPIAS

A first set of utopian contributions is made by people who come to Trosly in the hopes of finding there the conditions favourable to the exercise of a virtuous Catholic life, individually or as a family.

From 1964 to the present day, beyond the profound transformations of the Catholic world in France and in the world, the community of L'Arche in Trosly is a place where the evangelical reversal of social hierarchies is not only defended but claimed ("at L'Arche, the curse becomes a blessing"²): the achievements of poverty (including material poverty), meekness or humility are recognised, valued and encouraged. Also, it is a place where the organisation of work and the organisation of community life have, until recently, allowed for Catholic rites, as much in ordinary life (daily Mass, Eucharistic adoration, easy access to the sacraments, and so on) as during the key moments in the lives of individuals and their families. It is a space in which Catholic morality and the associated social norms (repertoire of the various states of life, sexual morality, recognition of the ecclesial institution authority and its representatives, etc.) are predominant.

Therefore, for some, it is a counter-cultural place that makes possible a zealous and publicly assumed Catholic vocation, while protecting it from outside influences. For some, the community is seen as a place

1. "A state of mind is utopian when it is at odds with the state of reality in which it occurs. This disagreement is always apparent in the fact that such a state of mind in experience, thought and practice, is oriented towards objects not existing in the real situation." Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia. An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, Paris, Librairie Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1929, p.72.

2. For example: Audio formation J. Vanier "Authority – Formation Berger" n°1, 2007. AJV.

protected not only from the moral and social decay of the *world* but also from that of the Catholic Church. Vanier himself, in numerous speeches and writings, denounced the values of the *world* and spoke of the “disarray” he observed in Catholic religious orders. He saw the urgency of proposing solutions to remedy this, placing the L'Arche initiative on a par with other Catholic congregations or spiritual movements that flourished from the 1960s onwards¹, such as the Little Sisters of Jesus². Like others at that time, he claimed proximity to “the first Christian communities” and tried to lay the foundations of a new kind of faith community, associating different states of life, but also – in the case of L'Arche – Catholics, believers of other religions and non-believers³.

The experience of L'Arche creates a tension between two positions among the members of the community. Some wish to withdraw from society, driven by a utopic vision to restore a zealous Catholic society. Others wish to work for change in the social and ecclesial reality, through reforms and innovations. Until the 2000s, we observe that the Catholic utopias carried by people belonging to this second category may have included some third-world or missionary militancy. For all of them, the community of L'Arche in Trosly has a social anticipatory function: it must be an “extra-mundane reality of the Kingdom of God”, aiming to bear witness to an already existing divine reign⁴.

COMMUNITY UTOPIAS

A member of L'Arche, who arrived in the Trosly community in 1974, recounts the motivations he had when he decided, together with his wife, to join the adventure:

1. For example: J. Vanier, untitled paper, 1970, pp. 17-18. AAT

2. A Catholic congregation of women combining contemplation and life in the world, founded in Algeria in 1939 in the spiritual tradition of Charles de Foucauld, by Madeleine Hutin, Little Sister Magdeleine in religion. This congregation is sensitive to the “spirituality of Nazareth”, which values the simplicity of daily life and “living with” the most marginal populations, which may explain why, over time, many links have been forged between L'Arche and the Little Sisters of Jesus. As far as J. Vanier, these links began in the mid-1950s, when his parents introduced him to the Little Sisters' community in Montreal.

3. J. Vanier, untitled paper, 1970, p. 19. AAT

4. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Le temps de moines*, Paris, PUF, 2017, p.48-49.

“There were three things that took root in me. A desire to follow Jesus, for me this was very strong, this relationship with Jesus. A desire to live in community. Because for me, living together is fundamental [...]. And then to be with fragile people. There was a kind of awareness that came over me that the world would not be transformed by strong people, solid people, political decision-makers. At that time, we saw this very clearly in the communist world. But the world would be transformed by the evolution of the poorest mass, the poorest people, the most fragile people. And this is a conviction that has become part of me over the years¹.”

The last two desires (life in community, life with the “poorest mass”) were built, according to him, on a political, intellectual (philosophical, political, psychoanalytical readings...) and practical training in spirit with the 1968 movement:

“For me, the year 1968 was a huge turning point because all of a sudden I had the feeling of becoming awake, of waking up. I actively took part in the protests [...] we spent a month in the street talking. It was an incredible moment.”

In the following years, pursuing this “idealistic utopia”, he followed a self-managed higher education course.

Like him, a significant number of people seeking community life were attracted to the L'Arche experience. Inspired by an experience of political activism, animated by strong social criticism and a desire for radicalism, they contributed to the L'Arche experiment, particularly in terms of shared life, collective work, and also the pooling of wages between the members of the community.

The 1964 initiative is indeed part of a historical sequence of community *revival*, particularly important in North American and Western European countries from 1965 to mid-1970². If “intentional communities” (i.e. groups of people “who dedicate themselves with intention, determination and commitment to a collective goal”) were typical in the building of North American societies since the first European settlements, they experience at this period “the greatest effervescence ever

1. Interview 55

2. Michel Lallement, Simon Cottin-Marx, Auréline Cardoso. “Les communautés intentionnelles : des utopies concrètes du travail. Interview with Michel Lallement”, *Mouvements*, n° 106, vol.2, 2021, p.110-120.

known” according to the literature¹. Driven by cultural and political upheaval, many sought to create or join communities, in urban or rural contexts.

However, as with Catholic utopias, the communal utopias that animate those joining the Trosly experience are heterogeneous. This diversity has fostered a tension in the understanding of the “mission” of L'Arche communities, which Pamela Cushing outlined in her doctoral thesis². While exhibiting some of the features of communities of “retreat” marked by “friendship, communal living and rejection of dominant values”, L'Arche is at the same time a community of “service”, looking “outwards”. In fact, while the intention of some of the members is to “resist or avoid the encroachment of the values of the dominant political economy by creating a safe place”, for others it is first and foremost to “serve a specific population” according to a “common purpose”, developing “structures” for this purpose, and “creating mechanisms and practices that are designed both to increase the commitment of the members and to work towards a greater harmony between their individual needs and those of the community”³.

MEDICO-PSYCHOLOGICAL UTOPIAS

Finally, the years of birth and the first years of expansion of L'Arche are marked by the contribution of a third set of utopian thoughts, mainly those of psychiatric doctors and medical or medical-social professionals working in the communities. Erol Franko, a psychiatrist at the psychiatric hospital in Clermont de l'Oise⁴ worked at L'Arche in Trosly part-time from 1967 to 1974:

1. Timothy Miller, “American Intentional Communities”, in Immanuel Ness, *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements*, Routledge Taylor&Francis, 2004, pp.1005-1006.

2. Cushing, *op.cit.* p.120-123, based on: Bazinet, Jean-Claude, “Communal Journeys: A phenomenological inquiry into the experience of living and working in L'Arche”, unpublished Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1995.

3. Bazinet *op.cit.* p.11-12, quoted by Cushing, *op.cit.*, p.121-122.

4. When the L'Arche community was founded in Trosly in 1964, the psychiatric hospital in Clermont housed several thousand patients (about 5000 according to Erol Franko). Since the end of the 19th century, it has been the largest psychiatric hospital in Europe in terms of both size and number of inmates. This situation is no longer relevant.

“It's true that I was very “soixante-huitard”(fan of the 1968 social changes) at the time. That is to say that we were for antipsychiatry, against psychiatric hospitals, against all hospitalisation, against chronicity, and so on. [...] It was terrible in the psychiatric hospitals, so for some years, we had already been using what we call institutional psychotherapy. [...] Institutional psychotherapy is one of the schools of French public psychiatry¹.”

Institutional psychotherapy² is a current of the antipsychiatric movement that developed in the early 1960s, advocating a total overhaul of the then current medical practices. It denounced the systematic confinement of people suffering from psychological or mental illnesses or disabilities in conditions similar to those of incarceration, as well as the harmful nature of the psychiatric discipline and methods of the time. In their diversity, antipsychiatric currents call for an end to systematic institutionalisation, an end to certain categories of psychiatric ‘treatment’ and even an end to the medicalisation of people. In the history of the fight for the recognition of the rights and equal dignity of people with disabilities, the movement for de-institutionalisation in this period represents a major step³.

Presenting himself as “of Jewish tradition” and not familiar with the “very Catholic” side of L'Arche, Erol Franko says that he found in the Trosly experience of the time an interesting space to develop institutional psychotherapy:

“So, in the public service, this didn't work well, or not often. But I discovered that at L'Arche, it worked very well! I had to admit to myself that all these rituals and all these situations where something important was shared [‘we talked about Jesus all the time; going to mass was very important, even though people were not forced to do so; in all the homes there was a kind of prayer in the evening, etc.’] were very precious, not only were they not to be spat on, but on the contrary, they were very important. And yes, it was really, for me, an effort that went against the grain, against the currents which I had been following! When I told others at the internship or the

1. SIPSA 1970 Moral Report, voted at the 1970 AGM. AAT

2. See for example François de Coninck and L'Équipe du Wolvendael (eds.), “La psychothérapie institutionnelle. Un lieu, un temps pour accueillir la folie”, *Une expérience de communauté thérapeutique*, Érès, 2008, p. 25-26.

3. Duane F. Stroman, *The disability rights movement: from deinstitutionalization to self-determination*, University Press of America, 2003.

hospital that at L'Arche it worked [...] it was very difficult to make them understand ... the religious aspects were present in L'Arche, but it was plumb into institutional psychotherapy. Yes, it was not in the air of the time, but it was a wonderful example.”

The L'Arche experience was soon publicly presented as a therapeutic alternative for people with disabilities:

“The pedagogy of L'Arche is essentially an institutional therapy, that is to say, a therapy that comes from the lifestyle and the whole atmosphere of the environment, from the way in which the assistants look at the disabled person and behave with them in a leading role¹.”

This has been reflected in EU documents, including internal regulations, over the years:

“L'Arche is a therapeutic environment where the disabled person receives the medical, psychological and therapeutic care he or she needs to find the best possible balance².”

From 1970 onwards, J. Vanier was invited to present the “L'Arche therapy” at psychiatric conferences. Accompanied by members of L'Arche, in particular Ann and Steve Newroth, founders of the L'Arche Daybreak community (Canada) in 1969, J. Vanier took part over several years in lectures at the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD) in North America, Europe and the USSR³. He was a member of the French institutions that discussed the care of people with disabilities (CREAI) and he was in conversation with the greatest North American specialists of his time, particularly the psychologist Wolf Wolfensberger, a recognised researcher at the Canadian Association for Community Living in Toronto, the founder of the first community service system for “mentally handicapped” people in the United States. Together they gave lectures and published a booklet in 1974⁴.

Though the way of considering persons with a disability, their rights, participation and representation in community life have profoundly changed since the foundation period in France and Canada in the 1960s,

1. SIPSA 1970 Moral Report, voted at the 1970 AGM. AAT

2. Règlement intérieur de l'Arche, June 1978, L'Arche, Trosly-Breuil, p.1. AAT

3. Interview 91

4. Wolf Wolfensberger & Jean Vanier, *Growing together*. Richmond Hill, Daybreak, 1974.

it remains that the community experiences of L'Arche are marked by this utopian legacy which gives them the confidence to propose innovative ways of inclusion.

Once again, we see that these medical and psychological utopias were fraught with tension. For instance, in the early 1970s, the members of the Trosly community clashed over the “lifelong” belonging of people with disabilities in L'Arche homes (could they *leave* the L'Arche home for another, possibly autonomous, life, while some assistants chose to remain for *life*?); and also about their relationship to material goods and “consumer society” (could they buy a TV and freely consume all the material goods they wanted, while the assistants in the community had chosen material poverty?)

THE COMMUNITY OF TROSLY: A HETEROTOPIA?

Despite their heterogeneity, the three types of utopian intuition intersected in the first years of L'Arche and echoed each other around a double criticism of the existing society. The first criticism has to do with rejecting the model and rules of competition and performance in the award of the social and economic value of work and people, and for the award of recognition (emotional, legal-political, cultural/social esteem¹). Consequently, all three utopias share the intention of recognising people with disabilities as people of equal dignity, of equal social “value” – even of *higher* spiritual and “heart” *value*, as formulated in the texts and words of T. Philippe, taken up by J. Vanier and others during the first three decades of L'Arche:

“L'Arche believes that a person with disabilities not only has the same rights as every other human being (right to life, work, education, medical care, etc.), but that they also have a message to give to the people of our time, who are often enamoured of material values where efficiency takes precedence².”

Furthermore, the Catholic, community and medico-psychological utopias are united in their rejection of the consumerist model³, i.e. of the dual social practice of purchasing goods and services and accumulating

1. Axel Honneth, *La Lutte pour la reconnaissance*, Paris, Le Cerf, 2000.

2. Règlement intérieur, L'Arche, 1979, p.2. AAT

3. Zygmunt Baumann, *S'acheter une vie*, Paris, Chambon, 2008 [2008]

material goods; of the perspective according to which this is the end of social existence; and also of the permanent dissatisfaction that is the social driving force, and of the norms of social recognition associated with them. Finally, all of them are found in a particular rejection of conspicuous forms of consumption and a refusal of any definition of the legitimate successful life that would be based on the two ideologies mentioned above.

Consequently, from its foundation, the community of Trosly takes on the features of a heterotopia, that is to say, of a *place other*¹ in which an experience of counter-society can flourish, attributing recognition on criteria that are inverted in relation to what is perceived as the criteria of the social world of its time, and in rupture with the actors and the socio-cultural frameworks of its time. But is it really?

L'Arche as a constructed ambition

“He often says that he would have been quite content if everything had stayed as it was – a house they could all settle into, a car and occasional trips. But part of him also hoped that they could help others leave the institutions².”

The expansion and institutionalisation of the “work of L'Arche” was neither contrary to the initial intuition nor left to chance. Rather, they appear to be the result of an initial ambition, an effective strategy for building a legal, efficient and recognised organisation, and an immediate and constant concern for establishing solid partnership relations with institutional players and donors in the medical-social field.

When the first L'Arche home opened on 4 August 1964, in a house that J. Vanier had just bought to live in with Raphaël Simi and Philippe Seux, the formal and legal framework for a much more ambitious project was already in place: J. Vanier had effectively anticipated the material and administrative conditions necessary for the rapid deployment of an institution capable of welcoming several hundred people in a few years. From the outset, the L'Arche home was seen as the first stone of a large-scale plan.

1. Michel Foucault, “Des espaces autres” Conference at the cercle d'études architecturales, 14 March 1967, in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, n°5, 1984, p.46-49.

2. Cushing, op.cit. , p.118.

LEGAL LEGITIMACY

To begin with, before opening the first home, J. Vanier ensured the legal and financial framework of his project by obtaining its legal support from a nearly century-old Parisian foundation called *Société pour l'Instruction et la Protection des Enfants Sourds-Muets* (SIPSA)¹. The latter considered the home project as an “experimental” annex to the Centre Val Fleuri in Trosly, “conceived and implemented” by one of its eminent members, Dr Préaut. J. Vanier, seen as a young recruit of Dr Préaut, was destined to “devote all his strength” to the project². To this end, he became a member of SIPSA at the beginning of 1964 thanks to the double co-option of two members on the board of directors: M. Prat, a wealthy industrialist, and Dr. Préaut, who had been a friend and supporter of T. Philippe and J. Vanier for several years, and in whose Parisian flat J. Vanier was living at that time³. Together, M. Prat and Dr. Préaut had opened a modest institution called Le Val Fleuri four years earlier, in a bourgeois house in the village of Trosly, to accommodate mentally handicapped men, including Jean-Louis Prat, son of the first⁴.

From an administrative point of view, the “L'Arche” project appears for the first time in SIPSA documents at the board meeting following

1. SIPSA was founded in 1866 by Augustin Grosselin, inventor of an educational method for deaf and dumb children. Initially named Société pour l'Instruction et la protection des enfants sourds et muets par l'enseignement simultané des sourds-muets et des entendants parlants (Society for the instruction and protection of deaf and dumb children through the simultaneous teaching of deaf and dumb and hearing children), it changed its name in 1904 to Société pour l'Instruction et la protection des enfants sourds-muets ou arriérés (SIPSA). Recognised as a public utility by the decrees of 10 May 1875 and 11 July 1904, its head office in 1964 was located in the 6^{ème} arrondissement of Paris (28 rue Serpente). The association was then chaired by Mrs Glatron-Grosselin, great-granddaughter of the founder.

2. Speech by President Glatron-Gosslein, SIPSA AGM of 4 July 1966. AAT

3. In fact, in the minutes of the Board meeting of 28 May 1964 at 10pm, it is noted that the address under which J. Vanier is registered is 15 place Vauban, Paris 7^{ème}, an address belonging to Dr Préaut who let him use this flat.

4. The Val Fleuri Centre is managed by a different association, called *Les commanderies du Feu Vert*, of which Mr Prat is president and Dr Préaut is vice-president. Both had already asked J. Vanier to take over the management of the centre in 1962. Preoccupied at the time by other concerns (doctoral work, the life of the “very young” group, the question of the priesthood), J. Vanier declined, as he himself explained in an interview in 1994: “In 1962 they asked me to become director of the centre. I had no idea what it was. I didn't even think about it. I was living in Fatima at the time”. “Interview with JV in 1994. APJV.

the AGM of 28 May 1964, during which J. Vanier is appointed deputy treasurer¹, supporting the treasurer Etienne Gout :

“The Council [...] gives Mr. J. Vanier, Deputy Treasurer, the necessary powers to open a new bank account and a new post office account through which the income and expenditure relating to the creation of the Ark in TROSLY-BREUIL will be processed. Vanier, Deputy Treasurer, the necessary powers to open a new bank account and a new Post Office Account through which the income and expenditure relating to the creation of L'Arche at TROSLY-BREUIL (Oise) will be processed, to draw, pay and endorse all cheques, and to create all transfer orders for the operation of these accounts, with the option of delegating.”

The minutes of the May 1964 board meeting show that the loan projects intended to finance future property purchases in the “experimental project” led by J. Vanier and Dr Préaut were already under discussion, as was a modification of the statutes to which we will return later². A month and a half later, a new general meeting was held to lay the groundwork for a first real estate loan. For the occasion, J. Vanier prepared a small argument, dated 2 July 1964, specifying the anticipated scope of the project:

“L'Arche opens its first home for mentally disabled young people in TROSLY, on the edge of the forest of Compiègne. This home for boys from the age of 16 is the first of a series of homes that will house physically and mentally disabled people for life: the mild cases and the bedridden. [...] L'Arche hopes to be able to open pavilions for the bedridden soon³.”

How did J. Vanier manage to convince the members of SIPSA to accept him as a member, but above all to take ownership of the project for which he was mobilising? SIPSA is a philanthropic institution of high-class Parisians, mostly women from the French aristocracy or upper middle class for whom participation in a charitable institution is

1. He was appointed deputy treasurer in support of Etienne Gout, treasurer of SIPSA, who was then pursuing an administrative career, becoming a few years later director of the National Social Security Fund.

2. The Board instructs the President to convene a new General Assembly in July to deliberate on a draft amendment to the statutes and, possibly, on a loan project.

CR, Board of Directors, 28 May 1964, SIPSA. AAT.

3. J. Vanier, “L'Arche”, p2, Trosly-Breuil, 2 July 1964. AAT

part of their class background and ordinary social practices. To join one needs double cooptation. Their meetings are, according to A. St Macary, “social gatherings¹ “. Such an institution can welcome a member such as J. Vanier without blushing. Moreover, at that time, the society appeared to be not very dynamic, as the activity reports from the mid-1960s show: as early as 1966, the balance sheets and management accounts of L'Arche had exceeded those of all the other SIPSA activities². When J. Vanier joined SIPSA, the society had just under 300 members, of whom only a few dozen seemed active. Moreover, it seems that the president, at that time, sought to renew the board of directors and to hand over to someone with the right skills, energy and social profile, so as to revitalise its activities³. For all these reasons, she gave an excellent welcome to the experimental project of L'Arche, which Dr Préaut, M. Prat and J. Vanier presented to her with enthusiasm.

FAVOURABLE FINANCIAL CONDITIONS

For J. Vanier, the fact of having his project carried by SIPSA and of joining its ranks himself has many advantages. First of all, SIPSA's board members include people in charge of various medical and religious institutions with which the small L'Arche group interacts, such as Léone Richet, doctor and head of department at the Clermont Hospital (and later Dr Louis Grimberg, who will take over from her), and Father André Stoecklin, Abbot of Ourscamp Abbey.

The integration of SIPSA also has financial advantages. Firstly, the “recognition of public utility” allows for donations and legacies to be received without tax burden (exemption from inheritance tax for real estate). Secondly, the recognition of public utility, combined with the seniority and financial solidity of SIPSA and the social status of its members, leads to an initiative that does not yet exist – what's more led by a foreign national – which is to take out large bank loans on the spot and to obtain subsidies from public and private donors. Thirdly, the fact

1. A. Saint Macary, *op.cit.* p.82.

2. Financial report for the year 1966. AAT

3. SIPSA's documents show that he intended to leave the presidency as early as 1965, and that he intended to entrust the presidency to J. Vanier in 1966.

that it was legally presented as a SIPSA activity allowed the L'Arche home (and the following homes) to benefit from the day rate conditions negotiated a few years earlier for Val Fleuri between the Commanderie du Feu Vert and the Oise Prefecture, with the support of members of the SIPSA board of directors¹. The "daily rates" paid by the Departmental Directorate of Health and Social Action (DDASS) to the homes provided an immediate source of income, which was essential for the running of the association's homes and the repayment of property loans.

Thus, several months before he initiated his first experience of living in a home with people with disabilities – in other words, *before the personally transformative experience had taken place* – J. Vanier, with the help of a group of relatives including Dr Préaut, who was close to the "little ones", had already ensured that the project would be legally registered with a recognised association, while securing ideal financial conditions and obtaining complete personal autonomy in terms of financial management.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PUBLIC ACTORS

From the very beginning of L'Arche, J. Vanier was careful to build a relationship of trust and to maintain a dialogue with the administrative interlocutors, particularly with the DDASS, which set and allocated the "daily rates". He develops contacts and links with political and administrative authorities², relying on the legitimacy of SIPSA. J. Vanier's objective was immediately ambitious: to have the "Medical Centre" planned for Trosly included in the French government's investment plan³, which would guarantee him a substantial and permanent source of funding.

1. Minutes of the SIPSA Board meeting of 18 July 1967. AAT.

2. On this subject, Alain Saint Macary writes: "What strikes me is his way of establishing relations with the authorities. As soon as a new prefect or a new director of the DDASS is appointed in the department, he takes the lead and goes to meet him, then invites him to Trosly. [...] Jean also sometimes invites the minister to lunch. He comes to share a meal in a home. [...] Several Secretaries of State and several wives of the Prime Minister also came to Trosly. I remember in particular the visit of Madame Balladur". A. Saint Macary, *op.cit.*, p.77-78.

3. The "Plans" correspond to sequences of incentive and indicative planning of investments in France between the end of the Second World War and the mid-1990s. The Vth Plan, which includes the Arche "Medical Centre" project, covers the period 1966-1970. The 6th Plan covers the period 1971-1975.

The first written description of this large-scale project found in the L'Arche archives dates from 11 October 1964, two months after the official opening of the L'Arche home. Written for the administrative interlocutors (DDASS of the Seine and Oise prefectures), this 6-page document entitled "The organisation of a unit for the happiness of the mentally and physically disabled in Trosly-Breuil" was intended to support a request for funding and a request for inclusion in the French government's 5th Plan. Taking note of the "deep and serious social and human problem" represented by the inability of people with disabilities to "fit into our technical and economic civilisation", this document positions the experiment developed in Trosly-Breuil as a "solution" to this "major" problem:

"The seriousness of the situation, the large number of mentally disabled adults, the lack of equipment, the difficulties in finding staff [...] a new and bold solution must be found. It is no longer a question of simply creating a home here and there, but of finding the beginnings of a solution on a regional and national level!"

J. Vanier and the members of SIPSA tried to position themselves as co-producers of public policies on disability, identifying needs with medical and institutional actors in the field and proposing ambitious "solutions". Intended to accommodate several hundred people with disabilities, the project is to build a "village unit, with ten or twelve homes, housing 8 or 10 disabled people", also including all the "common services" (cultural centre, central kitchen, workshops, etc.). It provided installation for several hundred families, the building of an "observation centre" intended to organise the installation of the people taken in, care infrastructures (hydrotherapy, gymnasium, etc.), 4 pavilions for "the bedridden and profoundly retarded", etc. The local infirmary (60-70 beds) is planned to "be at the service of other regional

1. J. Vanier (probable author), "L'ensemble de Trosly-Breuil en faveur des débiles mentaux", 1965 or 1966, p.2. AAT. It can be seen that the documents sent to the Prefectures assume the religious dimension of life in the future L'Arche homes, without this seeming to have been a problem. For example: "At the centre of this village, the church will be the visible and social sign of its unity: it is the church that will give it its soul and its spirit". J. Vanier (probable author), "L'organisation d'un Ensemble en vue du Bonheur des Inadaptés Mentaux et Physiques à Trosly-Breuil", 11 October 1964, p3. AAT.

workshops (in French, Centres d'Aide par le Travail de la Région)". Finally, an architect draws up the plan for this regional project¹.

The ambition of the project is still evident in the association documents of the following years. In 1968, four years after the opening of the first home, when the number of people accommodated had already risen to 80 (65 lodgers and 15 semi-boarders) and the L'Arche experiment already included 6 homes, the style is still the same:

"We are therefore planning to have a total of 100 disabled living-in people in Trosly or the surrounding areas with their corresponding workshops. One wonders if we should stop there. Is a village of 120 disabled people enough? [...]"

When you see the gap between the current equipment (and even the one actually planned) and the needs, you have to wonder whether the conception of a village is realistic. We will only be able to take in a hundred or so disabled people in Trosly. What is that compared to the current needs? Shouldn't we consider larger buildings, housing 1000 disabled? Trosly could still be seen as an ideal, a prototype, but, alas, a non-realistic prototype in the face of the needs and difficulties of such an undertaking. These objections are deeply relevant. And they force us to see the problem of the disabled in a broader perspective²."

From the very beginning of the experiment, a dialogue was established between the legal representatives of the project (SIPSA Board of Directors), the employee initiator³ and public figure J. Vanier, and the public partners. For example, the people at the Préfecture de L'Oise expressed reservations and made recommendations before agreeing to the co-financing⁴. For its part, the property department of the L'Oise Prefecture, which ratified the purchase of the land, made recommendations on the layout of the medical centre or the development of the infirmary. These recommendations will be taken into account in subsequent versions of the project.

1. J. Vanier (probable author), "The whole of...*op.cit.*", p.2. AAT; Moral report presented to the General Assembly of 24 October 1968. AAT.

2. J. Vanier (probable author), "Le Centre Médical pour Débiles et Arriérés Profonds à Trosly-Breuil (Oise), date unknown (between 1964 and 1968), p.1-2. AAT

3. In March 1965, when the management of the Val Fleuri Centre was vacant and the staff was leaving, J. Vanier agreed to take on the salaried position of director.

4. Letter from the Oise Prefecture to SIPSA, 1966. AAT

Generally speaking, the dialogue between SIPSA and the DDASS seems constructive and the "Medical Centre for the Debilitated and Profoundly Retarded at Trosly-Breuil" is accepted in 1967 by the Prefecture of Oise and included on the substitution list of the 5th Social Equipment Plan, established by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Solidarity. J. Vanier immediately launched an appeal for donations in order to buy two properties, one adjoining the home of L'Arche, the other adjoining the Val Fleuri. They will be purchased within the year.

The profile of the L'Arche community is therefore, from its foundation (and despite the personal stance of some members joining the nascent Trosly community life), that of a service organisation co-productive with public policy:

"We cannot remain indifferent to the policy of the authorities setting the standards for our homes. Our experience in Trosly and our philosophy must be used to develop the programme for the disabled; sometimes we have to fight so that bills, which could burden the functioning of our centres, are not passed... We do not have the right to remain passive with regard to the standards that may be set, just as we do not have the right not to comply with the regulations¹."

While pursuing what also appears to be a political objective, J. Vanier warns against the risk of closing off the emerging communities:

"If the spirit of a centre is that of a radical rejection of modern society and its condemnation because of the values of harshness, violence and enjoyment that they advocate, and if it remains locked focusing in the training of a small 'pure elite', the experiment will end in failure, it seems to me. [...] It seems impossible to create a centre for the disabled to help them progress if one does not at the same time try to tackle the very causes of maladjustment – that is to say, the ambient mentality of society. [...] The creation of L'Arche communities should not try to escape from society but to help society change its outlook and thus its values, by becoming more open to the 'weak'²."

1. J. Vanier, untitled paper, 1970, p.13. AAI

2. *Ibid*, p.13. IAA.

A REAL ESTATE ACQUISITION COMPANY

The four-part programme of the operation, which was included on the 5th Plan's substitution list in 1967, includes the acquisition of the "La Forestière" property (192,000 fr), followed by the construction, servicing and equipping of the common services and two workshops (more than 1 million fr), for the first and second parts. Construction was initially planned between 1970 and 1971. The other phases of the expansion of the Trosly-Breuil "Medical Centre" were then included in the 6th Plan¹. Despite the agreement of the public authorities, they were not carried out, by decision of the members of the community council of Trosly, as testified by A. Saint-Macary who actively contributed to the decision:

"I remember the day when [...] the Director of the DDASS summoned us to announce that the funding was indeed included in the Plan and that it would be available within two to three years. This news immediately provoked wide debate in the community. With the experience of many years of community life and difficult relations with the village, several objections were raised. With our backs to the wall, we realised that this project was more like that of an institution. [...] At the end of these debates, it was decided to reduce the project considerably and to carry it out in two successive stages. The project would be limited to building two homes for ten, one in Trosly-Breuil and the other in Cuise-la-Motte, each near the existing homes. The day we had to see the Director of the DDASS again to tell him that the project had been scaled down, we were not so proud. Because our response to needs was going to be much more limited. Moreover, though reducing the number of people meant a significant gain in quality, it also meant an increase in the cost per person²."

Thus, from the very beginning, the subject of real estate investments was the subject of remarkable active and efficient work by J. Vanier and the members of SIPSA who were mobilised with him. In addition to the acquisitions made possible by the Plan, J. Vanier personally bought the house intended for the L'Arche home in 1964, and launched other

1. The third tranche provided for other constructions and equipment on the "La Forestière" property and the purchase by SIPSA from "one of the promoters who made the advance purchase" of the two hostels already in operation in 1967 and the staff accommodation. A fourth tranche (purchase) had also been envisaged.

2. A. Saint-Macary, *Mes premières années...*, *op.cit.* p. 71-72.

property purchases with the effective support of members of the SIPSA Board of Directors. These purchases were made possible by financial arrangements that generally combined private donations (company foundations, bequests, Rotary Club, etc.), subsidies obtained from private or public bodies (primary social security funds, Secours Catholique, Oxfam Canada, etc.) and bank loans contracted on behalf of SIPSA (Caisses d'Épargne, Banque Brière, Caisse des Cadres, Mutualité Agricole, etc.). The number of real estate acquisitions increased every year.

Twenty-two years after the opening of the L'Arche home, at the time SIPSA became the L'Arche-en-France Federation, the latter is the owner of 48 properties (houses, buildings, plots of land, real estate, premises, etc.) on behalf of the activities of the L'Arche communities on French territory. Two thirds of these properties are available to the Trosly-Breuil community¹. This figure does not take into account the real estate owned by the associations founded for other L'Arche communities in France and around the world. This figure does not either take into account the real estate purchased by private individuals who are members or close to L'Arche, and which is made available to the communities. Sometimes the owners take steps to legally bequeath their property to L'Arche, on their death².

In all of this, the expertise of the SIPSA Board of Directors facilitates the job of acquiring and managing property.

FREE REIN

French law in the 1960s did not allow a man of Canadian nationality to be president of a French association – or even be member of the board of directors, theoretically³. However, SIPSA applied to the

1. 33 properties in several villages, valued in 1986 at more than 23 million Fr.

2. In 1986, J. Vanier owned four houses in Trosly (L'Arche, Les Rameaux, Le Sénévé, le Pigeonnier), and his mother owned one house (Les Marronniers). As for Mr Prat's heirs, they remain the owners of Val Fleuri and several adjacent buildings.

3. At that time, and until the Law of 9 October 1981, the decree-law of the Vichy regime amending the 1901 Law was still in force. It created a sub-category of associations (the "foreign associations") which were outside the common law and the ordinary regulatory framework and were placed under the close control of the police prefecture and the Ministry of the Interior. Their conditions of creation and existence are quite different (specified in Title IV).

Prefecture of Police and the Ministry of the Interior to change its status and become a “foreign association”, which it did by a decree of 17 March 1967. This change in the status of the association is not insignificant: it imposes constraints on the association, even if the fact that SIPSA is recognised as being of public utility shields it from a certain number of restrictions (Article 32 Title IV). For example, any change in membership must be notified by letter to the Prefect of Police, specifying the nationality and status of the incoming or outgoing members. We see how the resignation of Thérèse Vanier was reported in a letter sent by SIPSA to the office of the Prefect of Police on 6 February 1969. Similarly, there is evidence of a number of letters to the police prefect notifying changes of headquarters and specifying the conditions of their acquisition, scrupulously sending all the annual reports and accounts – including, subsequently, those of the “local committees”, delegated by SIPSA (see chapter 11).¹

J. Vanier was elected President of SIPSA at the meeting of the Board of Directors on 18 July 1967 at 8.30 p.m., which took place for the first time in the home of L'Arche, in Trosly-Breuil. At the same meeting, the merger between the Association des *Commanderies du Feu Vert* and SIPSA was voted, which was the subject of lengthy discussions between Mr. Prat, the members of SIPSA and Maitre Vincey, and which led to the establishment of contractual guarantees between SIPSA and Mr. Prat². We note that the Prefecture's recommendations in favour of a merger between the association des *Commanderies du Feu Vert*, which was legally responsible for the Val Fleuri Centre, and SIPSA, which was legally responsible for its “annex”, the home of L'Arche (which shared administrators, salaried staff and an associative purpose), seem to have played a significant role in the merger process, made official in 1967³: the merger appears to be one of the conditions set by the administration so that the “Medical Centre” project could figure in the Plan.

1. SIPSA Statutes, revised 1977. AAT

2. Minutes of the SIPSA Board Meeting of 18 July 1967, p.3. AAT

3. CR of the AGM of 15 June 1967, Moral Report. AAT.

THE PARTNERSHIP RELATIONSHIP, BETWEEN AUTONOMY AND CONTROL

An intentional community, a heterotopia forged by the coming together of several Catholic, community and medical-psychological utopian intuitions, the initiative launched in 1964 in Trosly cannot be described as humble, small or without strategic ambition – although the living conditions in the homes in Trosly remained modest during the first decades. The nascent community was neither isolated nor completely autonomous: it was linked to the administrative and medical-social institutions from the very beginning and was embedded in the legal frameworks of its time. Moreover, the administrative and financial support of the prefectural institutions and the partnership with the main French psychiatric hospital of the time had a decisive leverage effect on this pilot experiment.

The history of relations between L'Arche community in Trosly, its legal interface (L'Arche Oise, L'Arche en France) and their political and administrative interlocutors is marked by regular periods of tension – sometimes intense. The initial strategic choices we have just described undoubtedly explain the rapid growth and institutionalisation of L'Arche, but they also underline the extent to which L'Arche's autonomy, like any associative organisation dependent on public funding, is placed on a delicate edge. The associative and institutional framework of the foundation has many repercussions on the activity of L'Arche and on its deployment process: firstly, it imposes regular controls by the French administration to which J. Vanier and the Trosly community submit. Activity and financial reports were drawn up with great care, detail and expertise from 1965 onwards, and people from the DDASS visited the homes and the community at regular intervals. In addition, contact with the DDASS and the prefecture services allowed for dialogue on the definition of needs and the adjustment of the answers suggested by SIPSA, but also to circumvent and resolve the misunderstandings that were to punctuate the relations between the administration and the Trosly-Breuil community over the following decades.

Conclusion

While the study of the birth of L'Arche underlines the key role played by a few people close to and supportive of T. Philippe and the group of 'the little ones', such as Dr Préaut and M. Prat, it also requires an immediate shift in focus: other actors, other utopias and other dynamics were decisive in the success of L'Arche.

The work of narrating the meaning and intentions of the experience of L'Arche is essential for constructing the *internal* community relations. But the dissemination of these narratives should not mask the keen attention paid by the founder, from the outset to *external* relations. As we have shown, the foundation enterprise combines two intentions from its inception: to live an unprecedented and autonomous adventure based on utopian anchors, while playing the game of partnership with the public stakeholders, the only way of obtaining access to the resources indispensable to its growth. In other words: to be inserted into the socio-institutional frameworks of its time, while keeping the means to have free rein. Compared to other intentional communities or heterotopic communities of that time, the immediate and permanent concern to combine these two dimensions is a particularity that must be underlined.

This pattern is not specific to the Trosly community alone. It seems to be a marker of L'Arche community foundations all over the world, especially – obviously – in countries where there is a structured public medical-social action and institutional services for people with disabilities. For example, the success in 1969 of the foundation of the L'Arche Daybreak community in Canada and its subsequent development is based on the juxtaposition of similar ingredients: plural utopian contributions; immediate partnership dialogue with public actors in the realm of disability; but also the profile of the members of the first board of directors, co-opted by Pauline Vanier from the highest circles of the administration or the banking sector. In addition, A. and S. Newroth, founders of the community, underline how the "very close connection with the academic world", thanks to the links and support of Wolf Wolfensberger and the National Institute on Mental Retardation in particular, "proved to be very positive", immediately giving "great credibility" to the Daybreak community experience,

which was essential both for fundraising and for launching a partnership dialogue with elected officials and public stakeholders in the state of Ontario and in Canada¹.

1. Interview 91. For an account of the founding of the L'Arche Daybreak community, see also: Stephen Newroth, *The Gift of Daybreak. The Origins of L'Arche in North America*, 2020.

CHAPTER 11.
The exercise of power

Claire Vincent-Mory

This chapter examines the bestowal, sharing and control of formal power in L'Arche, with particular attention to the power of the founders J. Vanier and T. Philippe. The examination is based on a case study – the community of Trosly-Breuil – and the analysis of a singular material – the community constitutions.

Why focus on this community specifically? The *first community* in the history of L'Arche, the place where it all began, Trosly is the *community to which J. Vanier and T. Philippe belonged* until their deaths, as well as other charismatic figures in the L'Arche pantheon. The *Mother House* is the initial community for many founders and community leaders on all continents, as well as for international leaders of the L'Arche Federation. As an *international headquarters*, the International Federation of L'Arche Communities had its legal address here from 1973 until the 2000s, and international coordinators living in other countries resided here for several months each year as part of their mission until recently. A *model community*, it is the place where J. Vanier invites all new interlocutors to come and discover the spirit of L'Arche, as well as the space from which he draws many examples for his speeches and writings, distributed worldwide. It is a place of formation or rest for members of L'Arche from all over the world. Several of its constitutions have been taken as examples and copied by other communities. It is also one of the most visited communities. Finally, the community of Trosly is *at the heart of the issue we*

are concerned with: the majority of sexual abuse cases entrusted to the Commission took place there. People accused of sexual abuse have been members of the community and have held positions of responsibility. Victims and perpetrators of abuse still live in the vicinity and, in some cases, were still members of the community at the time of the investigation. For all these reasons, the community of Trosly appeared to be the pivotal case study for questions of formal authority and the exercise of power in L'Arche communities.

From a methodological point of view, how can we capture formal authority? We chose to study community constitutions, despite the general lack of interest in them, as the interviews showed: "The community constitution? we're not interested at all"; "what is it?"; "no one refers to it"; "you're the first person to tell me about it!"¹. The community constitution is, however, a major document of the collective dynamic: it organises the governance of the group, bestows powers, defines the procedures for identifying the main people to be put in charge, and in some cases for regulating, evaluating and controlling power. Although it is not a legal document – only the statutes of associations are – it has been generally understood that each community of the International Federation of L'Arche since 1973 must have one². In the case of Trosly, there are no less than 20 versions of this text, from the oldest (1967) to the most recent (2010). The constitution is a dynamic text, the result of a massive community investment. Each version has been the subject of community-wide consultation and careful elaboration and rewriting by a team of elected community members. The enacted texts have, in principle, wide approval: voted by 70% of the electorate, by the Community Council and by the Board of Directors. For all these reasons, the successive constitutions of the community of Trosly are far from insignificant: they are formalized reflections of the community's collective preferences and practices,

1. Interviews 91, 93, 118, 58, 54, etc.

2. The importance of all communities having a constitution is regularly recalled throughout the history of the federation: "Each community of L'Arche should have a Community Constitution which defines its structures of authority and responsibility. [...] The constitution should mention the following points [etc.]" International Council, February 1988, AAI.

and they give a sense of how authority and power are embodied and institutionalized in the community, throughout its history¹.

Without claiming to account for all the complexity of the actors and mechanisms involved in the governance and administration of a community in L'Arche, the discussion in this chapter highlights the rules, decision-making methods and forms of regulation, as well as the principles legitimizing power that may have played a role in the supremacy of the community leader and the collective *laissez-faire*.

The first three parts of the chapter, built chronologically, study the governance² of the community by its charismatic founder. From the foundation to the turn of the 1980s, J. Vanier accumulated all the legal, functional and symbolic positions of authority and put in place, with the support of relatives, the foundations of the community's governance (1). In a second phase (1980-1998), the governance came under the community council with J. Vanier maintaining control, in a visible context of 'catholicisation' of the authority model (2). Since 1998, the constitutional texts show both profound changes and a great deal of continuity, in a context where the influence of J. Vanier continues to decrease (3). In a fourth part of the chapter, we shift our focus to the international level, asking ourselves whether here too we can apply the conclusions we have drawn from our observations of governance in the Trosly community. At the Federation level, what is J. Vanier's formal power? What are the forms of bestowal, sharing and control of authority?

1. The Trosly community is characterised by an early and constant attention to formalising its organisation – which does not prejudice its effective, clear or relevant functioning. As an *intentional community*, it could have relied primarily on regulation through conflict and dialogue.

2. *Government* here refers to "a set of processes and/or activities involving a wide variety of actors and participating in giving direction to social groups and ensuring the integration of their components". Gilles Pinson "Gouvernance et sociologie de l'action organisée. Action publique, coordination et théorie de l'État", *L'Année sociologique*, 2015/2 (Vol. 65), p. 486. In the text, we sometimes use the word 'governance' as a synonym, without implying that it is a different process, free from questions of sovereignty, state regulation, or without normative scope. Jean Crowley, 'Uses of Governance and Governmentality', *International Criticism*, 2003/4 (n° 21), pp. 52-61.

The founding authority.

Centralization and personalization of power (1964-1979).

The first period of governance of the community of Trosly is in the hands of J. Vanier in every respect. He held all legal, functional and symbolic positions of authority.

“HE HAD A MANDATE BESTOWED ON HIM FROM ABOVE”.

J. VANIER FOUNDER, PRESIDENT AND OMNIPRESENT DIRECTOR (1964-1975)

J. Vanier was officially elected president of SIPSA at the ordinary General Assembly of 15 June 1967, after having been its main facilitator and deputy treasurer since May 1964 (chapter 10). Eager to take and remain in control, he promptly co-opted members or relatives of the Trosly community whose confidence he had acquired¹. Few of them actually attended the Board or General Assembly meetings, and the minutes show that those who were absent systematically entrusted their powers to J. Vanier. While this is a well-known method of securing a majority in votes, for J. Vanier it is also a way of fostering links between the two organisations. Vanier also saw it as a way of fostering links between the directors and the active members of community life.

When he was elected president, J. Vanier had been named director of the Val Fleuri Centre for more than a year by the Association des Commanderies du Feu Vert – of which the home of L'Arche had been legally considered an annex since its opening. By necessity, he takes on the role of director of the growing community. As president and director of a rapidly growing project, J. Vanier is in charge of everything.

1. After he became president, J. Vanier co-opted, for example, Mira Ziauddin, who became responsible for the L'Arche home after him in 1966. At the 1969 General Assembly, the names of J. d'Halluin, Jeanne Riandey, Gerry McDonald, A. de Rosambo, but also Agnès and Adriano Da Silva, who were opening a CAT and a semi-boarding school in Courbillac in Charente, appeared in the list of SIPSA members. J. Vanier had met A. Da Silva during his stay in Fatima some years earlier. The CAT project was soon to become the second L'Arche community to be opened in France, “La Merci” (see chapter 8). Marie-Hélène Matthieu, the future founder of ‘Foi et Lumière’ [Faith & Light], was elected a director at the same General Assembly in 1969. She then became vice-president of SIPSA, together with M. Prat, until the association's demise in 1986.

During this period, he and T. Philippe worked out the organisation of activities and the formalisation of this new dynamic. In particular, T. Philippe drafted “provisional statutes” dated 21 November 1967¹. Composed of 44 articles, this document marked a first stage in the formalisation of the experience and constituted one of the privileged working supports for the annual retreat of prayer and reflection of the small group of assistants (the “permanent members”) of the budding community, at Ourscamp Abbey, in 1968, 1969, 1970 and 1971. Until 1980, J. Vanier was not only the initiator and main facilitator of these times of reflection, but he was also the main writer of texts in which he formulated the vision, the scope of the project and its main activities. On the operational level, J. Vanier was in full control. Backed by the “Council” or “Work Council” established by the 1967 statutes, it was he who decided on “all definitive admissions and dismissals as well as in accepting trainee assistants as assistants”, and also on topics such as new homes or new types of work. He discussed the operating budget, investment and funding proposals. Until the mid-1970s, J. Vanier personally appointed members for the operational management (home leaders and main sectoral managers).

Renewed each year in January, the “Council” is a small group of community management members. At that time, it included J. Vanier, T. Philippe, two people appointed unilaterally by J. Vanier, and three people elected by assistants with more than a year presence in the community. J. D'Halluin was a member of the board from its inception, as was Jeanne Riandey, back in 1969. Thus, in addition to simultaneously holding all the functions of authority, J. Vanier ensures that the strategic proposals and decisions in managing community life that he puts forward are validated by a group that supports him. The members of the Council are bound to discretion on all matters discussed during the meetings².

1. T. Philippe, “Les statuts provisoires de L'Arche”, 1967, p.6. AAT.

2. *Ibid.* Moral report 1970 voted at the 1970 SIPSA AGM. AAT.

At the limits of a personal authority

The frequency and duration of J. Vanier's trips abroad meant that solutions had to be found to ensure continuity in managing daily life in the community. Moreover, in just a few years, the critical threshold of the community was reached. Due to a continuous increase in the number of members, homes and activities, the founder couldn't continue to take all the decisions concerning community life alone. This forced him not only to rationalize and organise community life and work, but also to delegate, by defining new functions (home leader, workshop leader", assistants' leader, etc.). J. Vanier was the only one to decide on who to appoint to these posts.

In 1970, he asked Antoinette Maurice, a 50-year-old single social worker from Compiègne who was a volunteer in the community, to become an employee and take on the role of assistant director in the community. The offer was supported by T. Philippe who, two years earlier, had personally invited her to join the Trosly community. In fact, as A. Maurice herself said and wrote, her mission was to fill in for J. Vanier's absences (functional responsibility, leadership of the management team, etc.), and then to discreetly take a back seat as soon as he returned to Trosly¹. So, until 1973, J. Vanier, founder, president and director, was also the only manager of the community. He then chose a young, highly qualified assistant – A. Saint-Macary – to whom he delegated the administrative and financial tasks:

“After a year's work in the outsourcing workshops, Jean asked me in September 1973 if I would be willing to take over the management of the community. [...] “I did not come for that,” I replied, “but I cannot refuse this service to the community²”.

Shortly afterwards, J. Vanier openly expressed his intention to also delegate the functions of statutory authority. At the SIPSA Board meeting of 12 September 1973, he proposed – unsuccessfully – to resign as

1. Antoinette Maurice, *Cette richesse...op.cit.* p.73-74.

2. A. Saint-Macary, *Mes premières années.op.cit.*, p.75. Coming from a privileged socio-economic background, a graduate of a French 'grande école', A. Saint-Macary had been working for 7 years in the banking world when in 1972 he decided to join L'Arche in Trosly.

Chairman of the Board, at least “temporarily” so as to “free himself from a number of tasks”. The Board of Directors refused: “after discussion it appears that in France this solution would undoubtedly be detrimental”.¹ J. Vanier would remain president of SIPSA until 1986, the official date of its absorption by the L'Arche-en-France Federation. The following year, in July 1974, he announced to the members of the community council that he wished to “relinquish certain management functions because of his international activities”, but also because he was considering “taking a sabbatical year”² – which would not take place until 1980. This motion should be seen in the context of his application for priesthood, submitted to the Vatican authorities in July 1975, in which he explained his intention to retire from his management functions and his obligation to remain as administrator of official institutions (see Chapter 3). His request for priesthood remained secret, and it seems that no one in L'Arche knew about it.

The need to rethink the operational organisation and the chain of command is shared. The archives show that members of the board pointed out at this time that ‘something [was] wrong with our mode of governance³. They were aware of the fragility of a model that relied almost exclusively on the founders:

“An accident affecting Fr. Thomas' health made us suddenly aware [...] that we had to set up a system that would allow the community to survive its founders⁴.”

After T. Philippe, in July 1974, it was J. Vanier's turn to be hospitalised in 1976. He was unable to fulfil his obligations for several months. In addition, many people wanted to retain the possibility of having a direct personal relationship with “the Management” (i.e. J. Vanier at that time) and were therefore in favour of relieving him of “immediate

1. Minutes of the SIPSA Board Meeting of Wednesday 12 September 1973, 8.30 pm, 25 boulevard Malesherbes, Paris. p.1. AAR

2. A. Saint-Macary, “Evolution in the mode of government of a community”, April 1975, p.4. IAA

3. A. Saint-Macary, “Sharing Experience: Evolution in the Way a Community is Governed”, April 1975, p.3. IAA

4.A. Saint-Macary, “Evolution...op.cit. , p.4. AAI

decisions” and operational management¹. For all these reasons, as A. Saint-Macary points out:

“Since the foundation, the head of the community was of course the Director, founder and confirmed by the Board of Directors of our Association – he had his mandate bestowed on him from above².”

“Until now, this question had never been asked. J. Vanier was Director by right [...] J. Vanier was and remains the undisputed charismatic leader. [...] in order to achieve our constitutional reform, we had to learn to create unity among ourselves and by ourselves without relying on J. Vanier³.”

This critical moment launches a new reflection and implies the distribution of power between the founders and the permanent members of the community. The process is not without its difficulties insofar as it questions its foundations: who can legitimately lead the community? How should it be run? Who can appoint the leader(s)? Who can control their actions?

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DOCILE HIERARCHY (1975-1979)

Reaching this critical threshold opened a period of transition: between 1975 and 1980, a great deal of work was carried out among the members of the community to develop a mode of governance adapted both to the identity of a project in constant evolution and to the requirements of continuous growth⁴. Regularly (1975, 1976, 1979), a new version of the constitution was drafted and then adopted by the assembly of permanent members and then the electoral body, a new collective body set up in 1976, for a probationary period. At the turn of the year 1976, O. Ceyrac was appointed deputy director, coordinator of the executive, and replaced Antoinette Maurice. J. Vanier remained director, “facilitator” and “head of the community”, responsible for its “unity”⁵.

1. *Ibid.*, p.2. IAA

2. A. Saint-Macary, “Partage d’expérience... *op.cit.*”, p.1. AAI

3. A. Saint-Macary, “Evolution...*op.cit.*” p.2 and 4. AAI

4. In particular, the geographical division of the community in 1976 into 4 locations (Trosly-Breuil, Cuise, Pierrefonds, Compiègne), to which was added the “location” of the Centre d’Aide par le Travail (CAT).

5. A. Saint-Macary, “Evolution...*op.cit.*” p.3. AAI

Formalisation of the dual spiritual and executive authority of J. Vanier

The mode of governance established in the 1975 constitution formally recognised the powers of J. Vanier, granting him both spiritual and executive authority. Until 1980, in spite of interruptions (international trips, illness), he remained the centre of community powers. The constitution gave him the right to unilaterally appoint some of the members of the “Council”, and named him and T. Philippe, *ex officio members* of various bodies.

That said, Vanier’s constitutional statement of the authority function is surprising:

“With the help of the former Council, the Group of 15 drew up a text for a constitution that put the last touches to a draft inspired by J. Vanier six months earlier. [...] The new constitution was adopted unanimously. J. Vanier was the facilitator and Miss Maurice the coordinator. [...] The originality of our new constitution is that it creates two distinct heads. The coordinator of the executive is the director, responsible for the community for the outside world. But within the community, he is subordinate to the Council leader, the head of the community. This system can only work if there is perfect unity between these two heads, but it allows for a dynamic between inspiration and action, the long term and the immediate, the ideal and the achievable, the primacy of the person and the organisation¹.”

The wording is strikingly opaque: a “coordinator” subject to a “facilitator”, a “director” subject to a “leader”... Constitutionally endorsed in the 1976 version, it formalises the practice of the time and anticipates what will happen next: the “director coordinating the executive” remains subordinate to the true leader of the community and “facilitator of the Council”: J. Vanier. Basically, we have here two complementary functions of authority: that of the operational director, who devotes himself to the smooth running of the organisation and is in charge of day-to-day decisions; and that of the custodian of the vision, who is ‘inspired’ and devoted to the ‘ideal’ and to personal and direct relations with the members. According to the constitution, the operational function is intended to be exercised by individuals for a limited period of time, while the visionary is not. The former function remains subordinate to the latter. The use

1. *Ibid.* p.4 and 6. IAA

of the phrase “perfect unity between these two heads” underlines the existence of a subordinate relationship to which both parties consent: there is “unity” insofar as the authority of J. Vanier is accepted and considered legitimate by the community coordinator and her successors.

At first sight, this hierarchical scheme might seem rather coherent with the status of a French association under the Law of 1901 which ruled L'Arche at that time. J. Vanier, president of SIPSA, in charge of vision and strategy, is legally superior to the operational manager (director), who is in charge of implementing this vision. The issues here are rather the following: J. Vanier, President and legal superior, is also an *ex-officio member* and facilitator of the governing body (Community Council), as well as the spiritual leader of the community.

Early governance: a moderate centralisation of power?

The three main decision-making bodies of community governance were created in this period. The Council (also called “Work Council”, then “Community Council”) is constitutionally defined as “the supreme body of the community”¹. As far as we know, this is the case in all L'Arche communities in the world to this day.

Led by J. Vanier who, alongside T. Philippe, is an *ex-officio member*, the Trosly community council has both political (the ‘vision’) and operational responsibility for the community. At this time, the council centralises powers. It is also an advisory body: constitutionally, its primary role is to “assist and enlighten the director on the decisions to be taken for the running of the community”². In practice, the council is a close circle of trust around the founder-facilitator. In the mid-1970s, the community council was made up of 15 people, including the *members by right* as well as trusted individuals chosen personally by J. Vanier for positions of responsibility (such as A. Saint-Macary, already mentioned, and Odile Ceyrac, deputy director from 1976). From 1975, it includes a collegial executive management (Execo) responsible for the “good functioning of the community”³. Thus, the council is not only a body to

1. Association SIPSA, Rapport Moral de l'année 1977, p.45. AAT
2. A. Saint-Macary, “Partage d'expérience... *op.cit.*”, p.1. AAI
3. SIPSA, Rapport Moral de l'année 1977, p.45. AAT

which the founder can ask for advice or opinions to support his personal decisions, but also a body to which he can delegate, if he so wishes and if necessary, part of his personal power. The council makes up for the founder's inability to be everywhere¹ while ensuring that the “spirit of the community”, the intuition and the will of the founder are respected and remain in force, even in his absence².

The actions of the community council quickly result in tension. According to Alain Saint-Macary, in its first year of existence, it was perceived as ‘suffocating the community’, imposing the preferences of a small ‘elite’ and shutting the rest of the community out of governance³. This kind of criticism does not come as a surprise, since the intentional community was undergoing a transition from a direct to a hierarchical pattern of governance.

The creation in 1976 of a new body called the electoral body, open to co-opted assistants of more than two years, was a response to the criticism of the monopolisation of power and the desire of the permanent assistants to participate in decisions for the running of the community. It was a question of “putting in [their] hands the major orientations and votes of the Council”⁴. The electorate elected a coordination of four people who joined the Council (including, in 1976: Jacqueline d'Haluin, Cécilia McPherson, Jean de la Selle).

Documents from this period (1975-1980) show a will to democratize power, a ‘bottom-up’ governance⁵, and there are insistent speeches on the importance of ‘collegiality’. This intention seems to be tempered in two ways. Firstly, as we have seen, the model of governance that was put in place during this first phase was a model of governance from above, combining co-optation by peers and appointment by a higher authority. Distrust of direct participatory models of governance and a preference for limited governance is asserted:

1. A. Saint-Macary, “Evolution...*op.cit.* p.1. AAI
2. Alain Saint-Macary, Working paper “les lieux géographiques dans la CONSTITUTION”, Trosly, 28 January 1976; A. Saint-Macary, “Evolution...*op.cit.* p.1. AAI
3. A. Saint-Macary, Document de travail... *op.cit.* IAA
4. J. Vanier (probable author), “Mode of Government”, 1970. AAI
5. A. Saint-Macary, “Evolution...”, *op.cit.* p.2. AAI

"It is utopian to let the grassroots conceive a project. [...] The grassroots must establish representatives with a mandate¹ .

Secondly, the functioning of the deliberative assemblies raises questions:

"In all the meetings, it was often like this: there was a lot of talking, we challenged each other, but we talked, we worked it out. For example, I remember one meeting. It was here, in Ourscamp for the Constitution, where Antoinette Maurice [...] we had had two or three constitution meetings, we were the constitution team, and she had been completely against something and all that... against Jean, against others... And then Jean said 'we're going to go and have lunch'. During lunch, I'm not sure what happened, but at 2pm she spoke up and said 'I was very virulent this morning. We talked during lunch and now I understand. This is what I think and I agree with you'. So there was unity like that, it was beautiful to see²."

According to this 'permanent member', her personal dialogue with J. Vanier during lunchtime led the protagonist to change her mind and agree with the majority. Other accounts in interviews gave similar examples, where a private conversation with the founder, bypassing the collective deliberative bodies, had led to the final decision. In this case, the deliberative assembly does not jeopardise the ultimate authority of the founder. On the contrary, it seems to have been a privileged means by which this authority could be wielded.

In general, the concern for harmonisation and consensus building behind and around the founder is permanent. The board and the management, in particular, have an injunction to be "ferments of unity for the community"³ .

THE "BROTHERS AND SISTERS" OF L'ARCHE AND THE ASPIRATION TO A RELIGIOUS MODEL

In spite of its precocity, this first sequence of formalisation establishes several distinctive characteristics of the governance of the L'Arche community in Trosly. In 1968, the fifteen 'permanent assistants' meeting at Ourscamp set out the first elements of a project now collectively and

1. A. Saint-Macary, "Partage d'expérience... *op.cit.* , p.4. AAI.

2. Anonymous interview.

3. A. Saint-Macary, "Evolution...", *op.cit.* p.6. AAI.

publicly designated as 'community'. The community was quickly presented as a "Christian community"¹ or a "Catholic community"² .

The following year a slightly more elaborate version of this document was called the 'constitution'. Why this name? The initiative of L'Arche could have been content with legal statutes (those of SIPSA) and possibly with internal rules or a charter of collective life. The choice of a "constitution" shows the intention of the founders to found a religious community. The archives of this first period (1964-1980) have preserved a number of working documents by J. Vanier, including religious publications on the drafting of constitutions for congregations and religious institutes³ . From the point of view of the Catholic Church, constitutions are legal documents, formulating both the "charisma" of the religious institute (i.e. the "special gift of the Spirit" which is its own⁴), its identity, possibly the spiritual tradition in which it is rooted, but also the internal legal provisions, the rules of life with which it endows itself, and its mode of governance. It is from this type of document that J. Vanier and the first constitution writers seem to have drawn their inspiration.

The intention to found a religious community is also visible in the early distinction between categories of members. The "provisional statutes" drafted by T. Philippe already differentiated members on the basis of the time of their commitment and their attachment to the spiritual dimension of the project. Thus, the category of "members" or "permanent assistants" – the hard core – is set apart from the growing mass of people coming to Trosly for a limited time, they are those who "want to commit themselves to living the spirit of L'Arche"⁵ . These permanent assistants must share a set of Christian values: "a keen sense of the gratuitousness of the Christian faith and of grace"; to be "flexible

1. T. Philippe, Provisional Statutes, 1967, Article 1. AAT

2. J. Vanier, untitled document, 1970. APJV

3. Among the sources of his inspiration preserved in the archives, let us quote for example an issue of the review *Vie consacrée*, 1978, n°5, including articles entitled "What to put in the new Constitutions?" or the article entitled "Why new Constitutions?", written by Michel Dortel-Claudot, SJ. APJV

4. *Ibid*, p.296. APJV

5. A. Saint-Macary, "Evolution...", *op.cit.* AAI.

to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit"¹; "self-giving, sacrifice, dedication to God's service, humble and loving acceptance of trials"², etc.³,

The commitment of the permanent assistants is "acknowledged by vote from the other permanent assistants"⁴. Since 1967, an assembly of permanent members, reserved for people with two years or more in the community, by co-option⁵, meets every week to discuss the questions that arise in their daily life in the community. The assembly is led by J. Vanier when he is present and he has the final say on discussions and decisions. Identified in the statutes in 1970 as "the source of governing bodies", the permanent members have been constitutionally responsible since 1975 for the continuity and direction of the community⁶.

At this time, both T. Philippe and J. Vanier were thinking independently about how to strengthen this strong core in the community. T. Philippe sees them as an "intermediate body", both with and yet distinct from the operational governing bodies of the community. He explained his point of view to the members of the Trosly community, but also to the participants at the Shadow Lake International Federation in 1975:

"All the members of the Federation have recognised the need for this intermediate body, which must remain distinct from the meeting of leaders. [...] As to the method of recruitment and the means of achieving this goal, the members of the Federation believe that the permanent members of Trosly are best qualified to specify these points, as well as to determine in a concrete way the qualities required for this function⁷."

It is interesting to note that he emphasises the authority of the permanent members of Trosly to take the lead on this issue for the whole Federation.

At the same time, J. Vanier wrote a letter to the members of the Trosly community in October 1976, in which he invited "brothers" and "sisters" to become involved:

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. T. Philippe, Provisional Statutes, 1967, Article 3. AAT

4. A. Saint-Macary, "Partage d'expérience... *op.cit.*", p.1. AAI

5. J. Vanier (probable author), "Mode of Government...*op.cit.* IAA

6. A. Saint-Macary, "Evolution..." , *op.cit.* p.2. AAI

7. Intervention of T.Philippe during the Shadow Lake Federation. AAI

"Personally, I very much hope that very soon we can get the permanent members (or committed brothers and sisters) going. It seems to me that we should not so much discuss it as make the leap. [...] The permanent members should commit themselves to their brothers and sisters in L'Arche, especially the poorest, according to the spirit of L'Arche and in a formula similar to the one I gave to the Bureau of Permanent Assistants¹.

This formula, which J. Vanier submitted to the Trosly community staff office earlier in 1976, is as follows:

"I commit myself to my brothers and sisters in L'Arche with whom I would like to live and grow, in the spirit that has been specified in the prayer of L'Arche, the statutes and the International Charter. I commit myself especially to the poorest of our community, the most lost and the most needy, in order to build all together a true Christian community, open and welcoming. I commit myself to take an interest in everything that concerns the permanent members (or committed brothers and sisters) and to be present at meetings unless I am prevented from doing so by my work or for personal reasons. In this case, I will always inform the permanent office."²

The idea and the formula precede the Covenant, "announced" for the first time by a group of L'Arche members from all over the world two years later, in 1978, at the Abbey of La Pierre-qui-Vire. On this occasion, M D. Philippe presided over a retreat for a group of 25 L'Arche members personally invited³, in advance of the International Federation planned in Châteauneuf de Galaure in 1978. The aspiration to live as a religious community was shared by members in charge of the Trosly community at that time.

In addition to the attention given to the definition of the members of the community, the constitutional texts show a concern to strengthen the links between the members with and without disabilities of the community, and the spiritual life of all, in particular by setting up in 1976 an

1. J. Vanier, letter to the members of the Trosly community, October 1976, AAT.

2. Handwritten document attached to J. Vanier's letter to members of the Trosly community, October 1976. AAT.

3. The first 19 announcers in 1978 are: Alain Saint-Macary, Anand Manicaraj, Anne St Maur, Barbara Swanekamp, Cecilia McPherson, Chantal Lemaire, Chris Sadler, Dawn Follet, Gabrielle Einsle, Gilbert Adam, Henri Wambergue, Jean Vanier, Luce Opitz, Martha Gunn, Michèle Dormal, Nadine Tokar, Odile Ceyrac, Robert Larouche, Ted Blanchett.

original body which does not intervene in the governance of the community, called *Agape*. An enlarged version of the permanent assembly, open to committed members, their spouses and people with disabilities (“those that are welcomed”), it is a space for socialisation where everyone can “become aware of their vocation and strengthen it together”, not a space for decision-making or power: “It is a time for developing a common awareness of listening to the poorest person, who is our master in truth, in simplicity, in wonder and in his or her sense of what is essential.”¹

CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, the governance of the community was centralised and personal during this period. All power was in the hands of J. Vanier, who was progressively supported in his action by several bodies and by delegating functions to people he trusted. T. Philippe also played a significant role and the constitution formally acknowledged his authority. The founders' quasi-monopoly on power was accepted by the members in charge we were caught up in a relationship of charismatic authority (Chapter 12).

The multiplication of constitutional texts is a sign of probing at this stage, as are the somewhat obscure formulas and drafts (notably the ambiguous ‘two-headed’ leadership). The probing is also explained by the explicit intention to avoid too rapid and rigid formalisation: the “spirit” of the community “cannot be verbalised but must be kept and revived constantly by and in people” who would embody “a living tradition”².

The mistrust in formalisation is linked to the dynamics of the foundation. It is similar to that experienced by other emerging religious communities at this time. In the Catholic climate following the Second Vatican Council, the tendency is to “live in a spirit of research and adaptation to life in full evolution”, without “definite constitutions”³, in a “fear of being bound by something – especially by a text”⁴.

1. Constitution of the Communauté de l'Arche, Trosly, 29 October 1987, p.3. see also Document “Les Agapés”, date and author unknown. AAT.

2. Intervention of T. Philippe during the Shadow Lake federation. AAI

3. Bulletin of the International Union of Superiors General (2^{ème} quarter 1976), p.31, quoted by Michel Dortel-Claudot, S.J., *op.cit.*

4. Michel Dortel-Claudot, S.J., “Why...” *op.cit.* p.295.

The process thus follows a subtle balance, which echoes the conclusions of chapter 10. While J. Vanier wants to secure the organisation of community life and its final authority, he remains cautious about the processes of institutionalisation, control and initiative and development.

“Trosly the Holy one”¹ (1980-1998).

A quasi-religious institutionalisation

In 1980, J. Vanier “asked to be relieved of his duties as director for a period of one year, starting on 1 November 1980”². This event marked the end of the first phase in which the founder held all statutory positions of authority. At the turn of the 1980s, the growth of the community levelled off: the number of assistants and guests stabilised and there were no more massive new building investments. During the 18 years that followed, the community underwent profound changes that resulted in a profusion of constitutional texts that were constantly being revised (1980, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1994, 1996, etc.). Three dynamics can be observed: the decision tree is becoming more complex; the model of authority is becoming visibly “catholicised”; and J. Vanier's participation and control capacity are being maintained.

THE COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS: INCREASING COMPLEXITY, SPLITTING, POWER OF THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

This second period is marked by important legal and institutional transformations that profoundly change the legal interface and the formal distribution of power in the community.

From SIPSA to the Federation of L'Arche-en-France

These transformations are the result of several dynamics that mainly affect the legal interface of the community. In order to better monitor the community's activity, additional levels are introduced into the SIPSA

1. Interview 43.

2. SIPSA moral report, 1981, AAT.

hierarchical chain¹. They multiply the number of interlocutors and make the decision-making and supervision processes more complex. Moreover, there are voices within SIPSA (including Mr Prat) that deplore the fact that it is only a registration chamber for the communities' real estate operations and ask to contribute more to the political and strategic missions that should, in principle, be those of the board of directors. Thirdly, the first process of administrative and political decentralisation in France (Laws of 1982 and 1983) and the organising of territory in medical-social public sector impose a change in the institutional partnerships of the communities: the supervision of the guardianship of homes for people with disabilities and the dialogue with public partners now take place at departmental level. It is therefore imperative to have autonomous associations at local level, capable of monitoring partnerships.

In this context, from 1980 to 1986, with the support of partners and public donors, the administrative and legal organisation of the activities of the L'Arche communities in France was redesigned. After several years of debate and provisional institutional experimentation², SIPSA was dissolved in 1986 and officially integrated into the L'Arche Federation, which from then on became its successor and was able to benefit from some of its prerogatives (e.g., SIPSA's recognition as a public utility). Finally, each community in France was now in a position to exist legally in the form of an autonomous 1901 association, member of the Federation L'Arche-en-France.

What are the consequences with regard to governance in the L'Arche community in Trosly? In 1986, the community set up its own autonomous board of directors called "L'Arche" association³. This coincided with the

1. The growth in the number of communities obliged SIPSA, from 1977 onwards, to entrust several small groups of administrators called "Support Committees" with the task of following more closely one or other of the communities, by delegation from the Board of Directors.

2. A first version of the Federation of L'Arche-en-France is created in August 1980. The "Friends of L'Arche" Foundation, founded in 1982 and of which J. Vanier is president, is intended to receive and process donations and legacies given to L'Arche and to take charge of operations outside the Federation involving public donors. Board meeting of 9 December 1981, SIPSA. ADO, box 120J02.

3. The association must be approved by the Association known as "Fédération de L'Arche en France" Association L'Arche, statutes of 24 December 1986. AAT.

death of M. Prat, founder and owner of several buildings including Val Fleuri, vice-president of SIPSA from 1967 to 1986 and president of the "Support Committee" delegated by SIPSA to the Trosly community since its foundation. His death gave J. Vanier a free hand to reshuffle the new board of directors of the community¹.

The splitting of the Trosly community

This second chronological sequence is marked by the splitting up of the Trosly community. Organised in 4 "places" (renamed "villages" in 1994) since the turn of the 1980s to allow for better management and animation of community life, the community of Trosly-Breuil was preparing to split into 3 distinct, smaller communities (Trosly-Breuil, Pierrefonds, Cuise). The division of a community that has become too large is an ordinary stage in any growing intentional community². The period of transition named by the members as "decentralisation" (1993-1998) led to the foundation of 2 new communities and the refoundation, by way of consequence, of the original Trosly community³. In this context of "decentralisation", a multitude of new bodies were temporarily added to the already dense organisational scheme, with the intention of 'facilitating' the transition⁴.

An incomprehensible operational structure

During the period 1980-1998, the community consequently underwent significant changes in its operational pattern which clearly complicated the internal functioning of community life. By attempting to clarify this pattern in a new section entitled 'structuring the community', the 1987 constitution entangles things even further. The community had two main intersecting operational axes (one geographical around "locations", the other by sector – assistants' service, management, administration, medical-psychological service, community activities etc.). The perimeter

1. J. Vanier co-opted three former members of the Support Committee to ensure continuity, as well as five new people with appropriate skills (including Gérard Bayle, the first chairman).

2. Michel Lallement, Simon Cottin-Marx, Auréline Cardoso. "Intentional communities...*op. cit.*

3. Structures of Authority for the years 1994 and 1995" document, L'Arche, Voted by the Electoral Body on 8 October 1993, p.1. AAT

4. Support group", "Steering committee", etc. *Ibid.* p.7 AAT

of this operational scheme is out of step with the legal division (there are 3 distinct legal entities in the community: residential homes; CAT; MAS:specialised homes for heavily disabled persons). In addition, the operational and legal entities are in principle placed under a double administrative supervision: two associations under the 1901 law are institutionally and legally responsible for the activities of the community: "L'Arche Oise" and "Les Chemins de L'Arche". Both are members of the L'Arche--in-France Federation.

Therefore, one of the effects of the complication of the authority scheme is the constitutional imposition, from 1980 onwards, of a triple appointment of the community's director-facilitator; the latter must be appointed not by one (in accordance to French law) but by three bodies: the boards of directors of the two associations bearing legal responsibility for the activities of the community (the board of SIPSA – later "L'Arche" and "Les Chemins de l'Arche"), as well as the bishop of Beauvais¹.

Finally, from the 1987 constitution onwards, there are autonomous spaces *within* the community, outside the operational chains of command and control and answerable only to the community leader and the Community Council².

An all-powerful Community Council

In this changing, complex and confusing legal and operational context, the main feature in the next phase is centralisation of power in the hands of the community council. Spiritually and politically 'responsible' for the community, the council enjoys great autonomy in its activities and has an ascendancy over the Boards of Directors to which it is legally subject. There is no external control or internal counter-power.

The community records at this time show that the lack of supervision and evaluation of the missions of members in charge is hardly questioned. The subordination of the boards to the community council

1. Constitution, 1987, p.3 AAT

2. La Grande Source (a home for newcomers or people passing through the community), Hosanna, the "La Pommeraie" home in Attichy, but also La Ferme. According to the 1987 constitution: "the Farm has a specific project and an autonomous operation". Draft constitution, 1987, p.2. AAT

is – at best – the subject of amused comment by members and observers alike, for reasons that have to do with the nature of the conception of the legitimate authority and mandate of the director and 'shepherd'.

On the other hand, the lack of internal delegation of authority seems to have raised some debate:

"Whenever the management meets alone with a home leader, a grassroots assistant, a person with disabilities, or with parents, there is a risk of disempowering the leader or the person responsible for the work. It is important for the management to care about the people. In return, they find it legitimate to meet with the management alone. Site managers are out of the loop. This phenomenon simultaneously contributes to congestion and makes management indispensable. It weakens the role of site managers¹."

The explicit and implicit encouragement of direct authority (and 'trust') between the highest and lowest levels of the hierarchical organisation, by promoting the centralisation of decision making and control, leads to the marginalisation and irrelevance of the intermediate levels. Centralisation also has consequences for the circulation of information. A reading of the archives reveals a shared feeling among the leaders of intermediate levels during this period that they had to operate in an environment full of 'unspoken' information².

The power and autonomy of the community council is enhanced by the weakening of the role of the electoral body during this period. Constitutionally defined as a body for 'decisions on certain matters entrusted to it by the Council', a space for 'awareness and debate on matters that concern the community as a whole'³, the electoral body votes on constitutions and elects several members of the community council. Since 1979, the rules of procedure also state that the electoral body serves as a "staff representative institution"⁴. However, voices were raised throughout the period 1980-1998 to denounce how it was being sidelined. For example, during the rewriting of the 1984 constitution, a questionnaire conducted among its members revealed that a clear majority felt that its "decision-making power" was only an "illusion"

1. Author unknown, "Reflections on our structures" document, 2 February 1984. AAT.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Constitution, 1978. AAT

4. Article 17 "Staff representative institutions", Internal Regulations, 1979, p.19 AAT

and that “the Electoral Body does not have the means to be collegially responsible for the orientations of the community”. They also regret not being able to play the role of “mediator for those with whom [they] work”¹.

We stress that participation in the electoral body is selective and subject to the control of the community council; the request to join the electoral body is made, in writing, to the community council (after 2 years of seniority). A member of the council must endorse the new entrant, and the council can vote by a 2/3 majority to exclude a member from the electoral body. These checks and balances are a method of securing the power and autonomy of the board.

Consequently, during this second period, the electoral body progressively loses its role as a counter-power and as a representative of the members of the community. It gradually becomes a weak body, refocused on a mission of information and discussion between members interested in community life. This double mission also benefits the community leader – who is statutorily one of the facilitators of the Electoral Body – and the Community Council – who can attend the meetings.

A QUASI-RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY?

CATHOLICISATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY

At the turn of the 1980s, texts relating to the governance of the community were distinguished by the increasingly assumed character of its religious identity. For example, the community's internal regulations explicitly refer to religious activities (services) from 1979 onwards, as well as to the presence of a chaplain “attached to the community”².

Constitutional role of the priest

The 1984 amendment to the constitution emphasises the inclusion of the L'Arche community in the church community. It introduces for the first time a detailed section outlining the role of the priest:

1. Questionnaire Bilan du Corps Electoral (*Review of the Electoral Body*), 1984. AAT
2. Rules of Procedure, 1979, p.7. Until the previous version, of 1978, the religious dimension barely appeared, in the course of a paragraph (Rules of Procedure, 1978, p.6-7). AAT

“One or more priests are mandated by the bishop of Beauvais to nourish the faith and Christian life of the community and its members, especially the poorest. These priests are brothers of all [other members], [and are themselves] members of the community to which they render a special service [...].

They are ministers of the Word of God and the sacraments. They are responsible for the liturgical life in the community.

They exercise a role of spiritual paternity for those who wish it. [...]

They participate in the Council, the Electoral Body and other bodies, to confirm and challenge the community in its Christian orientations and, on occasion, they guarantee the respect and freedom of persons. [...]”

The priest heads the pastoral commission, which has been given an increasing place in the constitutional texts, to the point of being identified as one of the main bodies of the community (alongside the Board of Directors, the Community Council or the Electoral Body, for example²) since 1993. Moreover, the priest is officially mandated by the bishop of the diocese:

“I have appointed a priest at L'Arche. It is important that the community gives him the space required for a spiritual paternity for those who wish it and that he can find his place in the various bodies of your community to participate in the decisions concerning its Christian orientation and to manifest the communion of L'Arche with the priests of the sector and the bishop himself³.”

Thus, according to the constitutional texts and the mandate bestowed by the bishop, the priest in the community has not only a spiritual authority in the name of the Catholic Church, but also an executive role. He is an ex-officio member by right of the community's decision-making

1. Constitution of the L'Arche community, 1984. AAT

2. “Authority structures for the years 1994 and 1995...op.cit. AAT

3. Letter from Mgr Jacques Jullien, Bishop of Beauvais to Miss O. Ceyrac, Beauvais, 19 December 1981. AAT The bishop's letter of mandate to G. Adam indicates that his ministry is not limited to the L'Arche community in Trosly in principle: “I confirm to you today in writing and I renew the mission entrusted to you in the service of L'Arche and, more generally, of maladjusted children and youth in our Diocese in connection with the various competent bodies. Letter of Mission from Mgr Jullien to Gilbert Adam, 8 November 1982. AAT.

bodies and of the highest of these: the community council. Combining his presbyteral status with that of assistant to the community, the priest depends is accountable to two different authorities, and this brings confusion to the chain of responsibility.

Spiritualisation of the language of the constitution

The constitution adopted on 29 October 1987 marks the culmination of this 'catholicisation' of the community. More than any other, it explicitly assumes the religious nature of community life and authority. The text makes extensive use of spiritual phrases and Christian references. It also inscribes more explicitly the link between the community governance and the Catholic Church. Numerous paragraphs intended to give the spiritual scope of the community project are added, particularly in the preamble of the constitution. The underlined passages in the following extracts are those added in the 1987 version:

"People with disabilities and assistants, working and living together, learn to help each other, to trust each other, and are a path of growth and development for each other. Together they form a fraternal community based on the spirit of the Gospel Beatitudes. The assistants who, after a time in the community, choose to commit themselves to it, feel a call to live in covenant with the persons with disabilities. To inspire, support, nourish and fulfil this community, L'Arche relies on the Church and its sacraments. At the same time, it is open to all those who, whatever their religion and personal search, wish to live this fraternal life respecting its attributes, and with a view to integrating with its environment.

L'Arche in Trosly is therefore both a professional centre approved by the Social Welfare Office, and a Christian community linked to the bishop of Beauvais, inserted in the life of the region. It is vital that these two aspects remain deeply united in both people and structures. This is why the director, appointed by the Board of Directors, is at the same time responsible for the Christian community. His mandate is recognised by the Bishop of Beauvais, who also appoints one or more priests to work with him, according to their respective ministries, to animate the Christian community. [...]

Everyone in the community, whatever their place, is called to build community, to help create trust, to support the leaders through prayer and an attitude of truth, and by shouldering some responsibility themselves¹."

The director-facilitator, "responsible for the Christian community"

A progressive catholicisation is particularly visible in the process of defining and legitimising the community leader.

In 1980, J. Vanier's decision made the community members reflect on the function of a community leader, who was no longer its founder. A consultation of the members followed by a discernment in which J. Vanier actively participated led to the appointment in 1981 of O. Ceyrac as director and A. Saint-Macary as deputy director².

To begin with, the development and implementation, from this period onwards, of a method of selection and appointment by 'discernment' and 'call' is part of a providentialist sort of logic. The consultation of the archives reveals that human and spiritual qualities are privileged, while professional skills are marginal. Secondly, the identification is conducted under the responsibility of a small group of people who are at the centre of the L'Arche dynamic and master its codes. While everyone in the community is in principle consulted, the method leaves much room for interpretation of what emerges from the consultation, and is open to influence and lobbying.

In addition, the definition of the role of the director as "responsible for the Christian community" was established in 1981 and has remained broadly stable to the present day:

"The Facilitator-Director is the leader³ of the community. He/she shares responsibility with the Vice-Director. As their role is to unify the whole

1. Draft Constitution, November 1987. AAT We stress that the passages added echo the documents written by T. Philippe in 1967 and 1980, and by J. Vanier in 1970 and 1976, particularly the reference to the "spirit of the Beatitudes".

2. "This event was the first opportunity in the community to discern who would be given the role of director. [...] This way of proceeding has the merit of not only having the best chance of choosing the person best suited to fill this role, but also of ensuring that the greatest number of people are committed to supporting him or her in the exercise of the role of director. L'Arche Association SIPSA 1980 Moral Report, p.60. AAT

3. The term 'community leader' is replaced by the term 'community manager' in the 1984 version of the constitution.

community in all its aspects, they are the bearers of a vision that they must share regularly with the community in order to inspire reflection and functioning. As the ultimate authority and reference for the community, they support and monitor the different leaders and work with the different bodies. They are in regular dialogue with the priest and the psychiatrist¹.”

By merging the two roles that were previously those of J. Vanier (facilitator) and the community coordinator, the constitution formalises the dual role of the community leader. From now on, he/she exercises both the powers that are usually vested in an operational director, but also those of a charismatic leader: “the ultimate authority and reference”, the leader is also “the recourse and defence of people and minorities” and “carries the exceptional situations”.

The conception of authority is charismatic and its scope is spiritual. It is entrusted with a spiritual responsibility:

“By delegation of the Board of Directors, he is both facilitator and director of the community. In this capacity, he is the ultimate reference for people and has authority over the different sectors of the community. He exercises this authority by listening to the Holy Spirit, placing himself at the service of the work that God wants to carry out in the community through the poorest. He is responsible for the whole life of the community to the associations legally responsible.”

Together with the priest, they are responsible for the spiritual animation².

Its mission is “to nurture community life, to make it ever more fraternal”³.

Thirdly, the spiritual authority of the person in charge of the Trosly community is validated by the Bishop of Beauvais, who confirms his/her nomination and mandates her/him in a rather formal letter, as we can see here in a letter from Mgr Jullien to O. Ceyrac in 1981:

“Odile,
The discernment group, made up of members of the Board, the Support Committee and the community [...] informed me of the unanimity around your name following consultations in the community. They asked me if I would accept you as the person in charge. [...]

1. Constitution of the Communauté de l'Arche, 1981. AAT

2. Constitution, 1987, p.3. AAT

3. *Ibid.*

That is why, as Bishop of Beauvais, I am happy to give my consent to your nomination. I ask you [etc.]

As agreed I will meet you here in Beauvais once a year and I will visit the community once a year as well. I would like you to inform me in writing before these visits of the subjects you would like us to discuss.

I entrust this true ministry that you are undertaking to the Lord and to his mother and assure you of my complete devotion in Christo¹.”

Until the mid-1990s, each appointment of a community leader was the subject of a letter of confirmation by the bishop of the diocese or by the diocesan administrator. Although L'Arche and its communities did not enjoy any form of ecclesial recognition as institutions at that time – so it seems – these letters of confirmation established a kind of formal link of authority between the head of the local Catholic Church and the leader of the L'Arche community in Trosly: the bishop “*gives his agreement*”, “*asks*”, and warns that he will come annually for a pastoral visit which will be an opportunity to review the mission. The role of community leader is recognised by him as a “*ministry*”, i.e. as a service of the church. In the eyes of the members, this is an act of ecclesial legitimisation of their community, but also a validation by the Catholic hierarchy of the spiritual authority of the community leader. Ten years after the previous letter, Bishop Hardy in turn confirmed the appointment of A. Saint-Macary²:

“I would like to tell you that I approve and confirm this appointment as well as the orientation described in the letter of mission: “to confirm the autonomy of the places and the leader’s role of shepherd.” You are called “to be a shepherd of shepherds, a convener, a man of peace, of wisdom, of prayer. [...] I gladly take up these words in full and address them to you personally³.”

As far as we know, the community of L'Arche in Trosly is not legally recognized by the diocese of Beauvais which would impose on it a

1. Letter from Mgr Jacques Jullien, Bishop of Beauvais to Miss O. Ceyrac, Beauvais, 19 December 1981. AAT

2. A. Saint-Macary was appointed Community Facilitator-Director in 1984, 1987 and 1990. Successive vice-directors are Chris Peloquin, Christine Mc Grievy, Veronika Ottrubay.

3. Letter from Adolphe-Marie Hardy to Mr Alain Saint-Macary, Beauvais, 24 November 1990. AAT

“vigilance” with regard in particular to “the integrity of faith and morals”, and that would give him “the duty and the right” to exercise his authority, if necessary. It seems, therefore, that the bishop is not in a position to exercise real authority over the leader of the community of Trosly (for example, to oppose an appointment or to dismiss a community leader whose action he would judge unfavourably...)¹. Moreover, as we have seen, the director-facilitator of the community is not only appointed by the bishop of Beauvais but by three bodies (the board of SIPSA, then the association L'Arche and the board of the association “Les Chemins de l'Arche”). Consequently, the appointment of the community leader by the representative of the local Catholic Church seems rather symbolic. The act of ecclesial confirmation is thus positioned on a ridge line; just as J. Vanier can be perceived as a “quasi-priest”, the community of Trosly can be perceived at this time as a “quasi-religious community”. The title ‘shepherd’, widely used in the mandate and internal documents of the community since the early 1980s, was introduced in the constitutional text from 1993². Its use can be traced in internal documents of the Trosly community until the early years of the following decade (meeting agenda documents, letters).

The constitutional definition of the role of community leader in Trosly thus appears to be a formal translation of the perspective defended by J. Vanier (Chapter 12) and of a model initially tailored for him. Firstly, it emphasises the personal qualities and relational dimension of the function – operational, managerial or regulatory tasks are not described. The constitutional text emphasises his role as ‘arbiter’ and ‘recourse for any person in the community who feels he has been treated unfairly’³.

1. Can 305, Can 312. The international association of L'Arche has been recognised as an international association of the faithful by Rome since 1999. Can. 305 states that “All associations of the faithful are subject to the vigilance of the competent ecclesiastical authority [...]”. We refer to the work of a competent canonist to reflect on how L'Arche was erected as an association of the faithful and how the duties of each were exercised.
2. For a definition of the role of the “shepherd” according to J. Vanier, see chapter 12: “The Coordinator-Director is the final reference and responsible for the whole community [...]. His role as shepherd is essentially to ensure the unity of the community, in the manner of a Regional Coordinator. “Authority Structures for the years 1994 and 1995...op.cit.

3. 1987 Constitution, p.3.

Boosting a charismatic definition of the leader's authority, it encourages a direct personal relationship between each member and the leader and promotes the image of the ‘saviour’ leader. Bearing in mind the absence we mentioned of a representative body of members in the community, such a definition has many perverse effects. It deprives the party who feels unfairly treated of recourse to a neutral third party, locking him or her into a deeply asymmetrical dual relationship. It also rejects the relations of power that run through the organisation, particularly in terms of human resource management and the allocation of funds.

THE POWER OF THE FOUNDERS: DECREASING PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

In this context, what formal authority did the founders have between 1980 and 1998? In terms of legal power, J. Vanier remained president of SIPSA until it was absorbed by L'Arche in France in 1986, of which he was then an ex-officio *member*, as in the local association “L'Arche”. Regarding the governance of the Trosly community, J. Vanier was an ex-officio *member* of the community council in his capacity as founder, as was T. Philippe, until 1987. Both of them (especially J. Vanier) therefore participated in all important decisions.

According to the constitutions, J. Vanier and T. Philippe are also ex-officio *members* of the discernment groups responsible for identifying community leaders and leaders in the activity sectors in the community, members of the executive management (“major” leaders)¹. The community archives show that J. Vanier remained a privileged interlocutor of the community partners and authorities, particularly the bishop of the diocese. During the 1980s, it was he who personally informed the bishop or the diocesan administrator of the names of the persons identified to become community leaders.

Present in all the decision-making bodies, how did J. Vanier behave during this period? A major leader of this period remembers:

“I was elected by the assistants to be a member of the council [...] From the beginning I saw and felt the importance of Jean in the community council. He is very, very important of course. But he always lets the director lead the

1. Constitution, 29 October 1987, p.8. AAT

group, propose the agenda, etc. He is extremely respectful, in my opinion. He is extremely respectful, as I remember, of the structures that are in place. We have always seen and [hesitation] considered Jean first of all as the one who meets people individually and advises them... but [hesitation] who doesn't try to take the decision instead of the existing structures. And I witnessed several times that he refused to give his own opinion saying: "it's up to you". But [hesitation] Jean was very, very intelligent and he didn't call things by their name¹ ..."

His participation in community governance is marked by a constant presence (when not travelling), a deep interest in the workings of the community, respect for the institutions of government and the holders of statutory positions of authority, but also a great capacity to influence.

For his part, T. Philippe rarely attended the weekly meetings of the Council between 1980 and 1991. Living at The Farm, where he was the sole master on board (Chapter 13), he devoted himself to religious activities. The members of the Council respected his "charisma" and some of them regularly consulted him for personal guidance or for the sacrament of reconciliation. One of the leaders in the community testifies to this:

"Father Thomas was considered an authority, an 'eminence grise' in L'Arche. We knew that he was very important, both for Jean and for the whole structure. And at the same time, we didn't see much of him [...] So his influence or his importance was very much in individual relationships. Because he received a lot of people and I went to see him for a long time²."

The 1987 constitution made a major change: the founders were no longer *members of the Community Council by right*. Symbolically, this does not mean the end of their participation in the community council, in which J. Vanier still participated as an elected member of the electorate. Moreover, he remained an *ex officio member of the bodies that appointed community leaders and "major leaders"*.

In addition, J. Vanier and T. Philippe were at the heart of a new body, the "groupe des sages" [the wise men] established by the 1987 constitution:

1. Interview 43
2. Interview 43

"The leader of the community meets two or three times a year with a group composed of two members of the Board of Directors, the two founders, the priest, and members of the Community Council designated by him to discuss certain issues of the community. This group does not make decisions. Its reflections are intended to help the Community Council and are passed on to it."

The composition of that "groupe des sages" changes in the following years. T. Philippe left Trosly in 1991 and died in 1993. The group gradually included all the former community leaders, particularly in the context of the "decentralisation" process between 1994 and 1998. Considered as a voice and advisory group, intended to ensure that the voice of the founder and a close circle is heard by the community council, facilitated by the community leader himself, the "groupe des sages" is in reality a group of influence. It was set up at a time when J. Vanier, but also O. Ceyrac for example, no longer held any position in the community. A vice-director from this period speaks of it in the following way:

"It wasn't the calmest, most peaceful place [...] In any case, it was in this place that, as director, I distanced myself from Jean and Odile and freed myself, because if you don't free yourself from Jean and Odile by being a director in Trosly [sigh] you have to say basta! [...] It was really very complicated. Jean and Odile had this sense that the community was not doing well, that everything was going wrong, they had a lot of worries¹."

During the 1990s, J. Vanier's participation in the community's decision-making bodies was gradually reduced and it seems that from around 1995 he no longer sat on the community council.

However, this did not prevent him from still being involved in discernment processes. In 1990, for example, in the context of the discernment process for the next community leader, his recommendations included a point developed in Chapter 13 the protection of the autonomy of 'La Ferme', T. Philippe's place. As a founder and prophet, he warns against any "static" institutionalisation: "a community must always be re-founded"².

1. Interview 21
2. Notes taken during the consultation with J. Vanier, during the discernment process

CONCLUSION

More than at any other time in the community's existence, the institutions of governance are strongly rooted in a Catholic frame of reference. While the community retains bodies for information and deliberation, power is centralised in the hands of the community council and more particularly in those of the community facilitator-director and vice-facilitator-director who, following the example of the founder and according to the constitutional texts, present themselves as both spiritual guides and operational directors. There is no real control or counter-power. This second sequence (1980-1998) is marked by the participation of J. Vanier in the governance of the community, which, although decreasing during the period, is maintained thanks to his ability to influence.

The pattern of authority and governance is confusing. The unusual multiplication of delegating and controlling authorities (L'Arche associations, Les Chemins de L'Arche, the bishop) causes uncertainty, opacity, but also competition and conflict between sources of authority: on which subjects must the director report to whom? Who leads the strategic direction of the community project, who defines the vision? Who has the legitimate power and who has the means to exercise it? The multiplication of delegating authorities appears above all to be an excellent way of preserving the autonomy and power of the community council.

Then there is the question of authority between the community leader and the priest of the Catholic Church. What is the hierarchical relationship between these two spiritual authorities? The wording of the texts sometimes suggests that the leader has no institutional authority over the Catholic priest (nor over the community psychiatrist, by the way) and that the power of the community leader cannot affect the independence of the Catholic priest. At the same time, the community leader is repeatedly referred to as the "ultimate reference of the community"; his title of "shepherd", the validation of his "ministry" by the local Catholic Church, but also the double status of the priest in the community, suggest that the community leader can be seen as superior to the priest. In any case, doubts and tensions prevail during this period creating more tension on a regularly basis within the community leadership.

to identify the next director of the community, October-November 1990. AAT.

The power of decision is held by a small number of people who are members of the Community Council, the "final reference", and more particularly, by those who detain two forms of power: control of the circulation of information; and charismatic authority. The first is in the hands of those who multiply positions of authority in various bodies and at various levels in L'Arche, or who, in addition to their responsibilities, multiply meetings and "accompaniments" of members. Charismatic authority is recognised in those who are designated as 'inspired' or who have the explicit support of the undisputed charismatic leader – J. Vanier.

Between 1980 and 1998, the Trosly model spread, particularly by members "being sent by the community" to found or take responsibility on communities in France and in other countries¹, but also through the sharing of its constitutional texts and reflections with other communities internationally.

Progressive control of power in the parent company (since 1998)

At the community of Trosly-Breuil, which resulted from the break-up of the "larger community", the electorate resumed work on rewriting the constitution on 27 November 1997. Adopted in 1998, then amended in 2000 and 2002, it quickly became obsolete. Indeed, the law of 2 January 2002 profoundly reformed the medical-social sector and imposed on the community of Trosly in-depth changes in the organisation and management of its activities. In addition, changes to the L'Arche association and the L'Arche-in-France Federation meant that the statutes of the former had to be updated and brought into line with the reference texts of the latter. Finally, in 2003, La Ferme officially became independent from the Trosly community. Because of these changes, the community council entrusted the task of revising the text of the constitution to a group of 5 people in 2010. The resulting constitution resulting from this work is the one in force today.

This last set of constitutional texts from 1998 to 2010 shows some interesting inflections. As in previous decades, the texts are modified but are now modernised and restructured: the decision tree is clarified,

1. Rapport Moral de l'année 1984, L'Arche, Association SIPSA, p.7.AAT.

the power of the person in charge is defined and the community governance is formally included in an organisational chart that goes beyond the community level alone. Belonging and commitment re-emerge as important issues. Finally, despite his growing age, the founder and member of the community remains an autonomous figure, part of the community landscape, and the leaders take him into account.

NEW INSTITUTIONAL BALANCES

The new community of Trosly-Breuil now has a narrower perimeter, a smaller number of members and homes, and a new framework of reference: the board of directors of the L'Arche association. At the Ordinary General Meeting on 15 June 2004, the association changed its name to "L'Arche Oise". Its activity increased significantly over the next few years: merging with other associations, it became legally responsible for the L'Arche communities in Compiègne, Pierrefonds, Cuise – then Beauvais, and the ESAT de l'Oise [workshops]. These changes brought a new equilibrium in rebalancing the power relationship between the community council and the board of directors. Thus, from the 2000s onwards, the leaders of the Trosly-Breuil community met and worked with the president of L'Arche Oise in joint meetings that also involved their fellow leaders from the other communities mentioned above. In this context, while retaining a certain symbolic importance, the leader of the Trosly-Breuil community is now only one among other leaders in dialogue with the Board.

At the same time, in the eyes of the community leader, the board continues to be seen as an instrumental body, without a political mission. The community leader and his or her community council remain the spokespersons and guarantors of the L'Arche vision:

"It seems to me that the board of directors was very much bound by the L'Arche project and therefore did not have all the authority, all the freedom, if I may say so, of a normal board of directors. It was not the board that defined the aims. The aims were defined by the people involved in the community. [...] we, the committed ones, took the defence: we are the ones who really know what L'Arche is all about¹".

1. Interview 43

Community leaders are involved in the discernment process that leads to the identification of successive association presidents, which promotes their legitimacy in the eyes of their partners, but contributes to the community council's sense of ownership:

"[we chose] a person who knew L'Arche in and out. The importance of knowing people with disabilities was also emphasised, as well as the administrative and legal capacities of the organisation. It had to be someone who had the stature and capacity to negotiate with people from the Department, the DDASS at the time, and then the ARS, etc.. So we chose someone from the inner circle, and at the same time someone who would be able to do the necessary representation and negotiation work¹".

The association is not independent. It is part of the organisation chart of the L'Arche-in-France Federation and is subject to its authority on a number of points. For example, its statutes must be approved by the Federation and it must formally declare its adherence to "the provisions of the International Constitution of L'Arche, as well as to the Charter drawn up by the International Federation of L'Arche Communities"². The president of the association exercises his authority over the six communities, in dialogue with the regional director delegated by L'Arche in France, according to a scheme establishing a triangular relationship between the latter, the president and the community leader. While this method allows the president of the board of directors to have an interlocutor whose geographical scope of competence is identical to his own (unlike that of the community leader), it also strengthens the power of the national federation, which has the possibility of closely following the animation and direction of the communities and can position itself as the referent of the vision and spirit of L'Arche in relation to its two associative and community interlocutors.

Since 1998, the text of the constitution of the Trosly community has explicitly referred to the authority of the regional director (or coordinator) of L'Arche over the community leader, who reports to him. The 2010 text takes a further step towards integration into the L'Arche organisational chart, by harmonising the constitution with the reference documents of L'Arche Oise and the Federation. In addition, the text clarifies

1. Interview 43

2. Statutes of the L'Arche Oise association, 2021, p.1.

the distribution of power internally, by explicitly distinguishing between “decision-making” bodies and “functional” bodies¹ (in particular the Conseil de la vie sociale (CVS) [Council of social life], a meeting and consultation place for the people with disabilities, imposed by the 2002 law). Confirming the trend observed in the previous period, the text confirms that the electoral body is now only an information and consultation body. Recently transformed into a “forum of assistants”, it no longer exists at the time of writing.

FRAMING THE AUTHORITY OF THE COMMUNITY LEADER

In this context, the role of the community leader is progressively framed and the relationships of authority in which he or she is involved find a new balance. The chains of delegation and responsibility for the governance of the community are named: with the board of directors, with the supervisory authorities, with the other major leaders of the community, etc.²

At a more formal level, a new authority of reference above the community leader is named for the first time in the community constitution: the regional coordinator, a member of the Regional Council, appointed by the L'Arche-in-France Federation. The inclusion of the community in a L'Arche organisation chart is explicit, and the concern for the participation of the community in the life of the Federation is included among the missions of the “shepherd”. Moreover, though the nomination procedure retains the L'Arche discernment method, it now conforms to the French associative law: a single board of directors is responsible for the nomination; there is no longer any question of approval of the nomination by the bishop (although it still is mentioned in the foreword of the constitution until 2010). Since 1998 at least, the leaders of the Trosly community no longer receive a letter of appointment or even a written acknowledgement from the Bishop of Beauvais on the occasion of their appointment, and relations are minimal for the duration of the mandates. The discernment team of the community leader is composed of the regional coordinator (who leads it), 2 members of the Board, 4 members elected by the

1. Constitution of the L'Arche community, October 2010, p.1-2

2. Constitution of the L'Arche community, 1998, p.11.

electoral body. Neither the founders nor the priest are mentioned anymore – but their advice is still sought.

The introduction of a mid-term and end-of-term evaluation procedure of the leaders under the responsibility of the Regional Coordinator is to be noted; this, once again places the governance of the community in a more general scheme of the federation government. The evaluation team is composed of the Regional Coordinator, the President of the Board of Directors, an elected member of the Electoral Body, a member elected by the Assembly of Long Term Members¹.

Finally, the community leader is relieved of his or her role as arbitrator, wise man or final authority in case of conflict. The 1998 constitution introduces a major innovation in this respect: 34 years after the founding of the community, a conflict resolution procedure is put in place, in which the hierarchical community leaders have no say². In the following years, a conflict resolution procedure was formalised by the Board of Directors, who was also in charge of its implementation.

However, if the authority of the leader is now framed, the definition of his or her role remains essentially the same: the community leader retains a dual mission of animator (“shepherd³ “ spiritual) and operational director of the community. The wording of the former is almost unchanged. On the other hand, the content of the director's operational and executive tasks is described for the first time in the 1998 constitution.

MAINTAINING CATHOLIC ROOTS

The 1998 constitution does away with some of the spiritual terms in earlier versions, such as the reference to the “spirit of the Beatitudes”. The openness to non-Catholics is more evident (“it is open to ecumenical and interreligious realities, and to people who, not having an explicit faith, wish to share this fraternal life⁴”). A decade later, the text reintroduces familiar

1. *Ibid.*

2. In 1998, Section 23, entitled “Conflict Resolution Procedure”, was entirely new. Recognising that “community life and working together inevitably generate blockages and tensions”, this section defines a conciliation procedure, a mediation procedure and an arbitration procedure. *Ibid.*, p.28-29.

3. *Ibid.* p.11.

4. *Ibid.* p.3.

elements of L'Arche spiritual discourse, expressions such as the "authority to serve" ("taking on responsibility is seen essentially as a service to all") or the reference to the Beatitudes and the Covenant ("Together they have the desire to form a fraternal community based on the spirit of the Gospel and in particular on the Beatitudes. Assistants choose to commit themselves to this community in order to live a covenant with the person"¹). This return is not so much a Trosly singularity as an attempt to bring it into line with the reference texts in L'Arche, which have retained these elements.

The Catholic roots remain explicit in the constitutions. The description of the double mission of the community remains strictly identical to those of previous decades. The combination of the "medical-social structure approved by the public authorities" and the "community inserted in the Catholic Church" is still present. The "community director" is always "at the same time responsible for the Christian community". The link with the bishop of Beauvais is clarified: "his mandate is brought to the attention of the bishop of Beauvais"².

Similarly, the community priest remains one of the main authority figures alongside the leader and deputy leader. The conditions of his reception in L'Arche and in the community of Trosly in particular are specified in the 1998 text, and the section relating to the appointment of the priest and his mission is developed and specified:

"He is a member of the Fraternity of Catholic priests of L'Arche. The community provides part of his salary. [...] [the priest] exercises his ministry according to a contract established between L'Arche and the bishopric³."

The priest (G. Adam) is still considered one of the community's "long-term assistants" and his salary is largely paid by L'Arche⁴. Together with the "Pastoral Group" (the new name for the "Pastoral Commission"), he remains the main actor in the animation of the "spiritual life of the community and the links with the church"⁵. Today, G. Adam no longer takes part in the activities of the Trosly community (see part 4).

1. Constitution of the L'Arche community, October 2010, p.3.

2. *Ibid.*, p.3.

3. Constitution, 1998, p.12.

4. For the year 2000, for example, the "priest's allowance" paid by the community amounted to €19,000. Financial report of the L'Arche community, 2001. AAT

5. Constitution, 1998, p.11.

THE RESURGENCE OF THE QUESTION OF BELONGING

The constitution adopted in 1998 shows a renewed concern for the issue of belonging and engagement in the community. Its resurgence is a sign of a moment of transition.

The constitution introduces new articles that precisely define membership and the various categories for community members ("confirmed", "associated", "spiritual"). It re-establishes a body ("assembly") of "long-term committed members" (or long-term assistants ALT). The commitment procedure is precisely defined with explicit conditions and criteria¹. While this assembly of committed members echoes that of the beginnings 30 years earlier, it is not quite the same. No decision-making role is given to the 'long-term committed' members.

The text is evasive. They are asked to "watch over the progress of the community, its fidelity to its history [...] its unity and respect for its diversity", but also "to challenge the Community Council". But "the assembly does not have the vocation to take decisions"². Thus, it is more an institutional act of recognition of their presence in the community dynamics, anchored in a common history, and of their fidelity to a "vision" and shared fraternal life.

On the other hand, for the first time in a Troslys constitution, "mutual commitments" are defined: with regard to the "confirmed member", the constitution defines the commitments of the community, particularly in terms of formation and support, but also financially (severance pay, supplementary pension, etc.). Moreover, should the Community Council, the Board of Directors and the Regional Council request the withdrawal of a confirmed member, the latter has a right to appeal.

The formalisation of the commitment, the introduction of the idea of reciprocity and the possibility of a right of appeal are new in a Trosly constitutional text. They establish for the first time the

1. Articles 2.10 to 2.12 of the constitution define, for the first time, a commitment procedure, identifying stages: one-month probationary period, admission for a maximum of one year, renewal of the commitment for a limited time of a few years, and then "after five to eight years, the assistant and the Community Council must reach a clear and written decision on long-term commitment or departure". Similarly, the criteria for becoming a "senior" member are spelled out.

2. Constitution, 1998, p.26.

responsibility of the community towards its committed members. It can also be seen as a sign of a weakening of the spiritual and providential perception of commitment, which pays little attention to questions of material or contractual responsibility. Finally, acknowledging community responsibility takes precedence over a personalization of the 'call', an important element as revealed in the interviews, despite the existence of discernment teams.

In the drafting of the 2010 text, it seems that the question of membership and categories of membership has once again been at the heart of the debates, particularly in relation to retired assistants who wish to continue their commitment to the community and to L'Arche. The question is also being revisited in a de-Christianised context – the majority of assistants in the Trosly community are non-Catholic and, increasingly, non-denominational. What meaning should be given to the commitment of the assistants, but also “how to respect the people who remain¹ “ and who, for their part, see their attachment to the community and to the L'Arche project from a Catholic perspective?

Debates about belonging are far from being a Trosly singularity. An unresolved issue, present in L'Arche since its foundation, it plays into the question of identity and spiritual openness, two main issues in the third governance phase of the Trosly community.

“THAT'S HOW IT IS WHEN YOU HAVE A FOUNDER IN YOUR COMMUNITY!”

The formal power of the founder is considerably reduced during this third period. With the status of a “long term” assistant among the others, until his death in 2019, J. Vanier participates in the meetings of the electoral body as well as in those of the assembly of confirmed members when he is in Trosly. According to the 1998 constitution, he remains a member of the “Council of Elders” (new name for the “Group of Elders”) where, together with the priest, the former leaders of the community, the regional coordinator and members of the board of directors, he gives advice to the community leader on general issues, helping him “to go deeper into certain fundamental questions”. However, this Council of Elders was soon discontinued (1999) on the new director's

1. Anonymous interview

decision, Maria Biedrawa, and with the approval of other former community directors, who “did not see the point of it”¹ and felt that there were other spaces in the community for people to speak out. For its part, the L'Arche Oise association does not remove the reference to the founders J. Vanier and T. Philippe, ex officio members of the Board of Directors, until several years after their deaths (when the statutes were amended at the General Assembly on 25 June 2021).

The withdrawal of J. Vanier is progressive. The 1998 constitutional text gives him a privileged role in a new chapter devoted to La Ferme: in fact, at this period, the autonomy of La Ferme continues to be the object of particular concern (“The person in charge of La Ferme is appointed by a separate team”²) and the name of “J. Vanier, founder of L'Arche”, appears in the list of the discernment group members who are in charge of identifying and appointing the “person in charge of La Ferme”³ (see chapter 13).

Autonomy and influence

J. Vanier remains the founding member, a prophet with an international aura, whose agenda, priorities and activities are beyond the community leaders' control. The L'Arche Oise association covers part of his expenses⁴. Maria Biedrawa, who was in charge of the community between 1998 and 2003, underlines its autonomy with humour:

“I drew an organization chart [of our community] and then I [hesitation] drew satellites around... Barbara, Jean... [...] this is the reality! I'm the director here, but I don't have much control! I'm the last one to know when the Japanese TV arrives at the Val, or when, out of the blue there is a meeting fall [laughs]. It was often like that. Well, maybe that's normal...at the time, at least, I thought 'it's normal, when you have the founder in your community, that's how it is' [laughs]⁵.”

1. Interview 21

2. Constitution 1998, p.13.

3. *Ibid.*, p.19.

4. In 2001, for example, the costs of supporting the founder's activity paid for by the L'Arche association (Oise) amounted to €58,100 (J. Vanier's “secretarial costs” – office equipment, telephone, etc.), plus his car expenses. “Budget association and community”, 30 October 2002. AAT.

5. Interview 40

We also observe the steady influence of J. Vanier in the unwritten practices of community governance. For example, although he is no longer an ex-officio member of the community leaders discernment team in Trosly, our interviews confirm that he was consulted every time, including on the drafting of the mandate, and that his opinions and suggestions carried weight. J. Vanier also continues to be consulted during the discernment process for the selection of the president of the board. The community records show that he no longer participates in any board meetings from late in the 1990s onwards, although he is still a statutory member.

The period 1998-2010 is a period of transition for the members of the community, as their founder, who remains a member, grows older. The community leaders are committed leaders, validated by the founder and by the faithful. In 2003, Karol Okecki was “called” to be community leader, after having been assistant director to Maria Biedrawa since 1998. He first arrived in the community of Trosly in 1981 and “announced the Covenant” with his family at the end of the 1980s. When asked why he was asked in 2003 and again in 2008 to assume two successive terms as community director, he replies:

“I heard they were divided. One half said ‘we need someone from L’Arche’ – but there was a generational change. And the other half apparently said ‘we need someone from outside’. And I was the person who was both from L’Arche and from outside. [...] Jean, I think was in favour. [silence] I was seen, I think, and moreover this was said to me at the end of my leadership, as someone who is not threatening, who is not going to start a revolution and who is going to make all L’Arche people feel secure in Trosly¹.”

In fact, despite the visible distancing between the founder and the governing bodies, the community directors in this third phase confirm that maintaining a bond of trust with J. Vanier remained an essential (albeit implicit) part of their mandates. In addition, on personal, friendly or supportive grounds, all of them kept in touch with J. Vanier at regular intervals in the course of their mandates. For example, Karol Okecki went to see J. Vanier every two months at his home:

“My meetings with Jean, as a director, were more to inform him about issues, questions, decisions to be taken, rather than to hear his opinion. In

1. Interview 43

my opinion he was very discreet. [...] It wasn't something that was written down in the constitution, but we both felt : it's good to meet, it's good that I keep Jean informed of my challenges and our challenges¹.”

The power of continuity

From memory, it seems to me that during work on the constitution in 2010, the place of the founders was not an issue. Moreover, there is no reference to J. Vanier, whose name no longer appears in the text.

However, beyond the founder, who was very withdrawn during the last years of his life in Trosly, the evolution in the community texts reveals a remarkable sense of continuity with the community dynamics. Every time traditional community documents were brought out during the successive rewriting of the constitutions and were consulted and mobilised by the team in charge. Moreover, although few members of the community showed an interest in the process of rewriting the constitution, a few contributors who were not part of the team invested themselves in the task. In particular, J. de la Selle and A. Saint-Macary, both of whom have been members of L'Arche for about 40 years and have contributed to many versions of the Trosly constitution since the 1970s.

Finally, the gradual removal of J. Vanier from the constitutional texts does not put a stop to the exercise of authority in the way he and those in charge of the Trosly dynamic had enforced for several decades.

It is therefore clear that the withdrawal of J. Vanier from the community governance does not end the type of authority and governance that he and his trusted associates had put in place.

J. Vanier's authority at the federation level

J. Vanier was not only the founder, president and first director of the Trosly community. In L'Arche, he is also the founder and first coordinator of the international federation. What power does he have at this level? What are the links between his authority and that of the international coordinators who followed him? The charters, international constitutions, policy documents intended to frame and specify the international

1. *Ibid.*

functions, but also the mandates, provide some answers. The exercise of power at international level has major points in common with the governance principles and chronology of the Trosly community.

1975-1999: JEAN VANIER, INTERNATIONAL LEADER OF L'ARCHE
Leader de facto and de jure

Founder, prophet and guide, J. Vanier played the role of leader during the first decade, giving impetus, taking initiatives, recruiting in droves, entrusting tasks or missions and formalising the “spirit of L’Arche”. A *de facto* leader, he became *de jure* leader in March 1972, when he gathered the founders of the first 6 communities around him in Ambleteuse¹. This first “meeting of the Federation” was the opportunity to draw up, for the first time, an international charter common to all the communities². The following year, at the second meeting of the Federation (Marylake, 1973), J. Vanier was appointed coordinator of the very first Council of the newly founded International Federation of L’Arche Communities. An association under French law with its headquarters in Trosly, it submitted a constitution in place of its “statutes”. This established a first draft of the Federation’s government, as well as organising the communities into three geographical “regions”. The text of the constitution immediately ensures that J. Vanier has a position of authority, even if he later abandons his role as coordinator:

“As a founder of the Federation, Jean Vanier is a member of the Council. If he is not already a member of the Council, he becomes a member by right. In this case, the number of members of the Council being increased to six, when there is a tie, the coordinator has a casting vote³.”

This first Council will never meet, Jean Vanier decides alone.

The Shadow Lake International Federation in 1975 has remained famous in the history of L’Arche. On this occasion – to everyone’s surprise – J. Vanier announced his intention to quit his role of international

1. These communities are: “L’Arche” (i.e. Trosly-Breuil), La Merci, Les Trois Fontaines, for France, Daybreak (Canada), Asha Niketan (India), Little Ewell (UK). Moral Report, SIPSA GA 1973, AAF.

2. With the exception of the Asha Niketan community (India) whose charter takes into account its inter-religious dimension.

3. Constitution of the Federation of L’Arche Communities, 1973, p.2. AAT

coordinator and asked Sue Mosteller (leader of the Daybreak community) and A. Saint Macary (then vice-coordinator of the Trosly community) to step in¹. T. Philippe participated in this Federation meeting. Admiration for what appears to be a choice of humility and selflessness is unanimous (see chapter 12). From 1975, Jean Vanier no longer held the statutory role of international coordinator. But did he leave aside all the functions of authority?

Interviews with the international coordinators confirm that in practice Jean Vanier retained a relationship of authority with each one of them until the end of the 1990s², in several ways.

Firstly, as an ex-officio member of the international council – a collegial body bringing together the zone leaders and international coordinators – J. Vanier participates in all the meetings. The coordinators we met confirm that J. Vanier was present not only at the councils, but also at each of their own working meetings. Geographical proximity makes this constant involvement of J. Vanier in the affairs of the federation possible: until 1999, it is a member of the Trosly community that is also international coordinator; and later on, their successors regularly reside in Trosly for significant periods of time in the exercise of their international functions.

Secondly, J. Vanier personally entrusts missions to the international coordinators, intervenes in their agenda, and expects them to obey – the word is never used – even when they disagree. At times and against the clock, J. Vanier asks to visit such and such a community, to prioritise such and such an issue, and punctually imposes a difficult decision (such as asking a community leader to quit his role). Finally, within the federation, his word carries more weight than that of the coordinator and he has the last word.

1. We quickly point out that the 1975 federation was the occasion for a constitutional revision and a modification of the federation’s organisation, which we will not go into at length. To follow the changes in vocabulary in this section of the chapter – the “Council of the Federation” becomes the “International Council”; intermediate institutions called “national” or “regional” federations are established. Headed by a “national or regional delegate”, they too must have a constitution, be approved by the International Council, and meet at least once a year. Constitution of the Federation of L’Arche Communities, 1975, p.5. IAA

2. Claire de Miribel and Joe Egan (1984-1993); Jo Lennon and Alain Saint-Macary (1993-1999), with Robert Larouche and Emile Marolleau (1993-1995).

"He always had the authority. [That is, I was the appointed authority, but Jean always had the authority. If I said something and Jean said something different, it was always what Jean said that was followed¹."

Interviews with the international coordinators of this period (1975-1999) yielded similar stories: all of them are accountable to him and feel grateful for his deep knowledge of the human and community situations in the federation, but also for his unconditional personal support. Between J. Vanier and the coordinators, the flow of information is asymmetric.

As at the community level, putting aside the statutory function of international coordinator allows J. Vanier to disengage himself from direct operational management and to devote his time and energy, in complete autonomy, to the missions that are closest to his heart: the founding of new communities and religious *leadership*.

Autonomous founder

At the international level, J. Vanier was intensely active in promoting the spirituality of L'Arche, recruiting new members, and also in the permanent foundation of L'Arche. In meetings and events, J. Vanier grabbed the opportunity to found: he picked out and approached future founders of communities, supported foundation initiatives, and evaluated the requests he personally received from clerics or important personalities in many countries. Above all, he initiated foundations in territories that seemed important to him. For example, in 1973, desiring the international expansion of L'Arche and convinced of the importance of opening communities on the African continent, he asked two young women, Dawn Follett and Françoise Cambier, to visit two African countries and identify the one that seemed most likely to host a community project and then to serve as "model community", from which the dynamics of L'Arche on the continent could be deployed². The Ivory Coast seemed to offer a more favourable administrative, political and ecclesial framework and, in February 1974, three young Canadians,

1. Interview 66

2. Presentation of the L'Arche foundation project in Ivory Coast, "Milwaukee Foundation", 1973, AAI

including Dawn Follett, opened the first L'Arche community in Africa¹. Similarly, in the decades that followed, Jean Vanier regularly expressed his desire to found communities in Asia, the Middle East, and then in the former USSR, and devoted particular energy to support the founding and deployment of L'Arche communities in these more complex territories, which he also saw as mission lands.

These foundation initiatives were carried out by him in a perfectly autonomous way during this period, which did not prevent him from informing the international coordinators as and when necessary. During the 1980s and 1990s, J. Vanier held several statutory positions at the international level, depending on his areas of interest, such as that of coordinator of the Asia/Oceania zone with Claire de Miribel, between 1988 and 1992.

Religious leader

Authority in religious matters is expressed in several ways. Firstly, over the years, Jean Vanier had taken charge of relations with the religious authorities, paying particular attention to relations with the Catholic Church. He regularly went to the Vatican to visit prelates, usually accompanied by an international coordinator it seems, for whom "it was instructive. But it was all directed by Jean². J. Vanier's relationship to the Vatican Church appeared to many of them as a personal concern, in which they did not feel really involved. Diplomatic activity with Catholic leaders also took place in national arenas: accompanied by O. Ceyrac, J. Vanier went every year to the assembly of French bishops which meets in Lourdes. This diplomatic activity bore fruit, and since 1999, the International Federation of L'Arche Communities has been recognised by the Vatican Church as an international association of the faithful³.

Then, within L'Arche, from the beginning of the 1980s, J. Vanier set up commissions to work on spiritual and religious issues; for instance, he initiated a group of church leaders in charge of an ecumenical dialogue on

1. Rapport Moral de l'Arche Bouaké, 1975, Dossier "Africa", AAI

2. Interview 66

3. To date, the Commission's work has not made it possible to trace the process of acquiring this Vatican recognition, which would undoubtedly prove interesting for the purpose of the report.

points of tension within L'Arche (such as access to the sacraments).

Thirdly, his authority over international coordinators in spiritual and religious matters applied to the 'covenant proclamation'. In the mid-1990s, he asked the four international coordinators to personally go to each covenant retreat in order to represent the federation, to participate in the preliminary discernments about whether or not to allow members to "announce the covenant", but also to "receive the announcement" on behalf of L'Arche. This request from J. Vanier followed a recommendation from the "group of theologians", inviting them to reflect on a way to link the announcement of the covenant to the institution of L'Arche. Here J. Vanier entrusted significant spiritual authority to the international coordinators – which made some of them extremely uncomfortable, "sick" of having to "sanction the personal spiritual journey" of another person: "what authority did I have to do that!"

Guarantor and reference for international coordinators

The unique role of J. Vanier in the international coordination of L'Arche was gradually formalised, particularly from 1990 onwards.

First of all, he plays the role of guarantor: by publicly maintaining a relationship of trust with the coordinators, the founder attests and testifies to their legitimacy for the position. In this perspective, it seems unthinkable for successive discernment teams to appoint a coordinator who does not have "the confidence of J. Vanier", i.e. without the latter's validation. In 1992, a document written by the discernment team² lists 26 "qualities" sought in future international coordinators, among which the following two:

10. To have Jean Vanier's confidence
11. To dispose of freedom regarding Jean Vanier but also to be able to listen to him³.

1. Interview 66

2. George Durner coordinator, Toni Paoli (France), Anne McKeown (Ireland), Isabelle Robert and Claire Trahan (Canada).

3. Letter signed by 'Claire' (Claire Trahan?), addressed to the leaders of the communities and the presidents of the administrative boards, Trosly-Breuil, 20 March 1992. AAI

Consequently, the actors of the federation gave J. Vanier a central role in designating coordinators. As early as 1975, J. Vanier suggested names for candidates, chosen discreetly among the members of the discernment team, and contributed to the drafting of the mandate by sharing "reflections" and "priorities"¹. During the 1990s, he was officially designated as the "International Council's reference for the discernment team"². Internal documents (1992, 1996) clarify and formalise the role of "reference person" entrusted to him. In 1996, an entire section of an internal document intended to formalise the discernment process was devoted to him. It states that J. Vanier must be consulted from the beginning and throughout the stages of the process.

"When the team has drawn the shortlist, Jean will be consulted before the team reaches a consensus. (Jean must feel comfortable with the people on the shortlist.). [...]

At the last discernment, George Durner, as team leader, knew Jean's personal opinion but did not share it with the group (so as not to influence people). Their relationship was based on trust, which was a good thing and worked well³.

Appointed "reference person" of the discernment team, he is expected to have "experience" and "vision", "even if everything goes well". Formally, J. Vanier is in control. He participates in all stages of the selection process and his contribution is seen as "vital": he is expected to provide names, mediate conflicts, and provide insights.

" 6. Role of the Founder:

We see Jean Vanier's contribution as essential to the process. In addition to participating fully as a member of the International Council, we see value in asking Jean to submit his own list of people he considers to be potential candidates. We also see value in having the discernment team consult with him to get his views and feedback on the candidates on the shortlist at the end of stage 2⁴.

1. Letter from George Durner, on behalf of the International Coordinators' Discernment Team, to Area Coordinators and International Coordinators. Verpillières, 9 April 1992. IAA

2. *Ibid.*

3. International Federation of L'Arche, "For clarification of responsibility and authority at the international level". Orientation Paper. International Council – Calgary, March 1996. IAA

4. International Council, Appendix 2 "Discernment process. International and Vice

If the prior validation of the candidate by J. Vanier is explicit in the texts, it cuts both ways, for the caller as well as for the one called, as Jo Lennon's account shows:

"In the summer of '92, I got a call from George Durner who was leading the process and he said, 'We'd like to call you to be an international coordinator'. And I said, 'No, George, I have no experience! Pat would be much better, he's more of a leader than I am'. I said no. Then George said, 'No, Jean wants you to do it'. So I thought, 'Oh, my God. So...well, I'll do it [hesitation]. Then I said I needed discernment – I did – and then Pat said he would really support me. [...] So I thought, OK, I'm going to say yes, but it's in absolute trust in God and the Holy Spirit to guide me, because I really didn't feel capable in some ways!'"

This point requires some clarification. J. Vanier is not the only one who is asked to give names, and his choices are not always followed to the letter. For example, eight years earlier (in 1984), in an attempt to impose a name, J. Vanier was opposed by several members of the international council and had to relent. However, the international leaders that were actually appointed after the "regular" discernment process (Claire de Miribel, Jo Egan), although not J. Vanier's first choice, had his trust and were part of his first circle. Selecting of a coordinator is an exercise in co-optation by peers that safeguards the leadership group, under the control of the *de facto leader*.

From one level to another: continuous definitions of authority

Between 1973 and 1999, there is a great deal of consistency in language and perspective in defining the role of the holder of statutory authority, among the international texts and those we have presented for the community of Trosly-Breuil.

The 1973 Charter of L'Arche communities, the first international text voted by the members of the International Council, bears witness to this. This coherence can be explained by the identity of the drafters: they are partly the same. Alongside J. Vanier, A. Saint-Macary in particular worked on international *and* Community texts at the same time. The 1973 Charter echoes the Trosly Constitution in several ways. Firstly, it uses the same spiritual vocabulary:

international coordinators", p.4. IAA

1. Interview 66

"We also believe that the person who is wounded in his or her abilities and psyche has possibilities for love that the Holy Spirit can bring out, and we believe that God loves him or her in a privileged way, because of his or her own poverty. [The primary aim of L'Arche is to create communities inspired by the Beatitudes and the spirit of the Gospel¹ .

Secondly, it emphasises the social and political participation of L'Arche communities, the partnership with public and private sectors, but also the project of social transformation through faith and example, the importance of which was shown in Chapter 10 as from the birth of L'Arche².

Moreover, the formal definitions of the roles of authority of the regional (and then zone) and international coordinators are variations of the role of the community facilitator-director: responsible for "maintaining unity", "he or she must have a global vision of L'Arche and be attentive to the different calls of the Holy Spirit and to the new signs of growth in the Federation"³ . This definition remained steady for 25 years. The list of qualities expected of an international coordinator in the 1990s bears witness to this. Human and relational qualities are mainly sought⁴ ; but also qualities of "shepherding" ("to be someone with vision and inspiration"; "ability to bring about unity"; "a model of presence in his community", etc.).⁵

These sought-after qualities show how much the definition of the function of the international coordinator is modelled on the example of J. Vanier. The role is twofold: responsible for the unity of the federation; guide and spiritual reference. It is, however, a delegated function, as J. Vanier remains the first and last authority on both aspects. Moreover, by his person and presence, he embodies the unity of the federation. For the coordinators, the responsibility for maintaining unity in the Federation thus takes on a special meaning: maintaining unity means cultivating the link with J. Vanier and – by implication – keeping the founder at the centre.

1. Charter of L'Arche communities, 1973, p.1-2. AAI.

2. *Ibid.* , p.4-6. AAI.

3. Constitution of the Federation of L'Arche Communities, 1978, p.11. IAA

4. "Ability to be in front of very complicated and delicate situations; to be at ease and open towards other cultures and religions, to be available, to be clear with one's speech and thoughts, to be able to dialogue, to be flexible and wise", etc.

5. Letter signed by 'Claire', *op.cit.* 1992. AAI

During the 1990s, the concern for a better formal definition of Jean Vanier's specific role becomes apparent. In 1993, the mandate invited the coordinators to "be attentive to the present and future place within L'Arche of Jean Vanier and Father Thomas"¹. In the next transition, in 1996, an internal policy document of the International Council of L'Arche gives the following objective: "To recognise and clarify the unique mission of Jean as founder of L'Arche"².

SINCE 1999: A SLOW EMANCIPATION, ON THE TEMPO OF THE FOUNDER.

"I don't think we can talk about all this without talking about our founder. And the transition from our founder to an institution. It's a transition that took place over many years, with a lot of trial and error, often in an empirical way³ ..."

In December 1999, Jean-Christophe Pascal and Christine Mc Grievy became international coordinator and vice-coordinator for two consecutive terms. During this decade, authority at the international federation level changed without dropping its loyalty to the authority of the founder. At the Atlanta Federation in 2012, Patrick Fontaine and Eileen Glass took over.

Institutionalization

Between 1997 and 1999, the constitutional, legal and operational framework of the international federation changed. A new constitution was voted in and a new legal basis was established: the two previous associations (one under French law, the other under Canadian law) were dissolved. A new single association under French law, "Fédération internationale des communautés de L'Arche" was founded in 1999⁴ and the international coordination and board of directors of the new federation gradually took shape:

"It took a long time to set up, if we refer to a traditional board of directors with its traditional prerogatives. Because in the end, the ultimate authority

1. Terms of Reference of the International Coordinators, 1992. IAA.

2. International Federation of L'Arche, "For clarification of responsibility...*op.cit.*"

3. Interview 64

4. Association under French law, because of the history and structure of L'Arche, but above all because of the possibilities offered by the flexibility of the 1901 law (particularly in terms of taxation, control and international transfers of funds) compared to the legal frameworks offered by other countries in which L'Arche is established.

was with the international leaders and I think that we were, in that sense, in the continuity of Jean [laughs] but we were also in the continuity of what people expected in the Federation. They wouldn't accept that a member of the board of directors, who was outside of L'Arche, who didn't have the experience, who wasn't a member, and so on, was taking decisions¹ ..."

The first chairman of the board was Colin Maloney who, in the eyes of the coordinators and the "discernment" team, was precisely an insider: "Colin was more of a coach than a chairman"². Although the Board of Directors is gradually becoming more solid, its modification in 2010 into an "International Supervisory Board" contributes to limiting its role to legal and financial aspects, leaving the political authority to the international leaders.

Operationally, the federation was partially restructured around 2008: the "international council" was renamed the "international policy council", "zones" were replaced by "countries" and the international responsibility functions were readjusted accordingly. The financial balance and the reinforcement of the federation team "a kind of giant with feet of clay³" are two central points of attention for the successive coordinators, insofar as they put at stake the power relationships between the higher level (federation) and the lower levels (countries, communities) and the capacity of the federation to exercise its mission.

The institutionalisation of the federation also implies acquiring international political recognition: the international federation of L'Arche communities was accredited in 2015 as a reference body at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), a place for debate and collaboration between various actors and United Nations bodies.

The end of J. Vanier's leadership

The international coordinators are gradually gaining autonomy from J. Vanier. This is reflected in the mandates. From 1998, they no longer mention J. Vanier. They also contain elements of openness such as the obligation for the coordinator to have a spiritual guide from outside L'Arche. Nevertheless, the 1998 and 2004 mandates as well as the

1. Interview 64

2. *Ibid.*

3. Interview 64

discernment protocols continue to invite to “meet with Jean Vanier on a regular basis”¹.

Moreover, it seems that J. Vanier's foundation initiatives are now supervised, as shown by the example of a member of L'Arche to whom J. Vanier, with the support of a zone coordinator, entrusted the mission of opening a new community in Russia in the 2000s. Frightened by this request, he contacted the international coordinators. Their answer was categorical: there was no question of founding a new community in Russia; they opposed J. Vanier's project, which upset him².

At the turn of the 2000s, J. Vanier officially left the International Council. This withdrawal is reflected in the constitutional texts: the most recent version of the constitution, adopted at the Atlanta Federation in 2012, refers to J. Vanier only once in Article 5 under “Purposes” as the founder of the organisation. He no longer appears in any description of the federation's governing bodies.

Finally, several symbolic milestones signal the end of J. Vanier's international leadership, such as dropping the term “coordinator” in favour of that of international “leader” during the international federation in Atlanta in 2012, and the end of the “Letters of L'Arche”, a major tool for the dissemination of information in the federation, and of J. Vanier's word, initiated by the latter – with his own agreement.

Identity transition

This second sequence is a period of identity transition:

“At that time L'Arche was not proactive at all. We welcomed life and walked with it as it came, so making plans for a succession did not exist”³

Community founders and charismatic figures in the pantheon of L'Arche gradually withdrew. The period was ‘unstable’ and the

1. For example, in 2004, the “Selection process for the President and International Coordinators” document mentions, on page 3, under the heading “Guidelines for the process”: “Particular attention will be paid to meeting Jean Vanier; the outgoing International Coordinators and Presidents, their spouses and/or relatives”. Selection process, 11.03.2004, p.3. IAA

2. Anonymous interview

3. Interview 64

coordinators felt they were ‘on the front line’ of the many leadership problems faced by communities around the world, filling in for those who were absent and filling in as best they could. In 2002, at the Swanwick federation, the international council drew a worrying and “difficult” conclusion about the state of the L'Arche federation:

“It was a group that was out of breath, divided about its identity, losing motivation, caught up in all sorts of issues. [No, it wasn't going well. And the fact that we stopped and said in Swanwick [9th international federation, 2002], it's not going well, we have to do something, and this is what we propose. At that time, we proposed Identity & Mission, which was a spiritual conversation to somewhat redefine the why, what and how of L'Arche. Why are we here, and how? What is it? And then, how do we do it?”

In 2005, on the recommendation of an anthropologist, Gerald Arbuckle, and after an internal analysis of the difficulties encountered in L'Arche, the international coordination launched a process of collective redefinition of the values, the project and the foundations of belonging to L'Arche, called the “Identity & Mission” process. This initiative initially met with the mistrust and disagreement of J. Vanier. It led to the adoption, at the International Federation in Calcutta in 2008, of the “Common Statements of Identity and Mission”³. Following this, a review of the institutions and governance of L'Arche was carried out with the support of a firm of experts (McKinsey) in 2009. According to the latter, the revision of international governance was imperative for several reasons, including the declining role of the founder. The McKinsey report emphasises the

1. Interview 87

2. Interview 64

3. The Identity & Mission statements are: “1. to announce the gift of people with learning disabilities and to empower them to take their rightful place in our communities and in our societies; 2. to create flexible models in response to the needs and vulnerabilities of people in our communities (core members and assistants) and the needs of people with learning disabilities in our local cultures; 3. to encourage, support and sustain membership and commitment of new and long-term members; 4. To foster an environment where we can live out in our daily lives our identity as communities of faith; 5. To integrate and harmonize our faith, community and professional lives; 6. To be fully involved in our culture, engaged in dialogue with it and to value and to bridge religious and cultural differences; 7. To announce and be a witness to the vision of our common humanity, (everyone is of unique and sacred value, and everyone has the same dignity and same right. Charter)”.

importance for the L'Arche federation and its members to enter a new "post-founder" era, as the founder turned 80. It is about ensuring that "L'Arche International has the leadership roles, structure and resources to effectively lead L'Arche"¹, but also that the organisation prepares to build its visibility, identity and legitimacy outside and beyond the person and word of J. Vanier².

The adjustment of values and the definition of the identity of L'Arche continues today, as shown by the reworking of the Charter of the L'Arche communities: if the Charter of 1993 is still in force, a new version, the result of a collective work carried out over the last two years in all the communities of the world, should be voted on at the next international federation in 2023.

"Taking care of the relationship with the founder means taking care of the whole".

Does the gradual withdrawal of the founder signal the end of his presence and the end of the legitimacy of his authority at the international level? From 1999 to 2019 (death of J. Vanier), if the international coordinators gain autonomy vis-à-vis the founder, the latter's validation remains, according to them, indispensable: "Jean's accolade"³ plays an legitimate role within the federation. Moreover, J. Vanier is still present, involved in topics that are important to him:

"He would ask 10 people for the same thing to make sure it was done. This and that, or he would ask one and then ask the other. He would undo what the other had done. It was a bit messy, you could say that. And all very personal, very, very personal⁴."

He is particularly active in maintaining relations with the religious authorities, with the "group of theologians" and with "church people" in general. The international coordinators get involved and sometimes take over from him, appreciating the opportunity to share special

1. McKinsey & Company. "Preparing L'Arche Internationale for the next era of mission. Needs assessment of the structures, resources and management system of L'Arche Internationale". Final Report. July 2010, p.3.

2. "Summary of areas for improvement", area 6, *Ibid.*

3. Interview 64

4. Interview 64

moments with J. Vanier on these occasions. They share his interest in maintaining relations between L'Arche and religious representatives¹.

Jean-Christophe Pascal and Christine Mc Grievy are attentive to "taking care of [their] relationship with J. Vanier":

"We were about to go through a transition that was very important for Jean and for L'Arche, in terms of our vision, our perception, but also in terms of our links. Christine and I, I think, invested heavily in our relation with Jean. [...] For me, he was the founder who had moral authority over the Federation, and taking care of this relationship also meant taking care of the whole. And if things were going well, he left us completely free to [laughs] do what we needed to do. It was part of a work of unity and continuity. It was really important that Jean was happy with what was going on, because if he started not being happy with what was going on, we would have problems. Not us as individuals, but the Federation² .

The maintenance of a link that they describe as "communion" involves regular meetings between the coordinators and the founder: "we took time off for one or two days", "in a small house, we ate together"; this made it possible to report to the founder, while respecting his privacy and silences. The sharing of information remains asymmetrical.

"Frankly, there wasn't much I didn't say, on a global level, because I wanted to make sure he didn't feel excluded and that he felt part of it. And then he had things to say too, there were a lot of things I didn't know. The information was valuable [...] He had concerns that he shared with us, he told us about his things – but obviously he didn't say everything. We knew that he didn't tell us everything. And we knew that there were places we couldn't go³."

After them, Patrick Fontaine and Eileen Glass continued to maintain a trusting relationship with Vanier, meeting regularly and passing on information. While they say that they never felt "controlled or directed by him", they confirm:

1. *Ibid.*

2. Interview 32

3. Interview 32

“In a way, you wouldn't want to not have Jean's approval, because then it would be very difficult to work, given his position. I mean, really, you had to have a good relationship with him¹.”

Thus, to the very end, Vanier is a key figure for the international leaders, but also for a reason that he couldn't have anticipated: their mandates are weighed down by the denunciations of sexual abuse and the investigations presented in Chapter 18. These are gradually monopolising the work of the international leaders. In a new way, the founder and authority figure J. Vanier is back at the centre of international coordination concerns:

“The Thomas Philippe case, which Eileen and I worked on the most [...] took a lot of our energy. It was like a hold-up of our mandate. [...] Moreover, in the last year, with the blow of the Thomas Philippe case still at its height, the Jean Vanier case began with an isolated testimony that we took very seriously. Our attempts to untangle Jean's contradictions and to get him to do and tell the truth about his story eventually took over our work, to the point of taking up most of our time².”

When Stephan Posner and Stacy Cates-Carney were appointed international leader and vice-leader in 2017 at the Belfast federation, the handling of the 'J. Vanier affair' remained a major concern.

CONCLUSION

Tracing the formal marks of J. Vanier's authority in L'Arche, both at the community and federation levels, leaves no doubt about his power, influence and autonomy in the organisation he founded. While his capacity to control gradually diminished over the last two decades of his life, there continued a participation of trusted individuals in the governance bodies of both the community and the federation. The consistency of their presence in the discernment teams for the main functions (international leader, community leader) for 40 years is particularly striking.

This chapter highlights a permissive institutional framework, unable not only to control (and sanction if necessary) its founder, but also unable to do without him, the embodiment and “man who made sense”

of L'Arche. Over and beyond J. Vanier, do today's institutional frameworks allow for supervision and control of those in authority at the various levels in L'Arche?

On this point, the case of the community of Trosly, although singular, is instructive. The concept of authority and the evolution in governance community that we have presented echo those of other communities in the world – not concerning its Catholicity. In general, since the turn of the millennium, the intermediate levels are increasingly contributing to the definition of governance and the documents, the wording and the approach to authority seem to be undergoing changes within the federation, giving increasing weight to the inclusion of all, to evaluation and to control. Further analysis is required.

However, besides Trosly and the international contexts, the survey shows that two tensions remain. First, tension arising from two views of governance, one providential, the other legal-rational; second, since 1964 and to the present day, an obsession with 'unity' – quite common for an international organisation – still sometimes struggles to surface out of a personalisation of unity, as the one embodied by the founder.

1. Interview 78

2. Interview 87

CHAPTER 12.
The authority of J. Vanier.
A sociological look

Claire Vincent-Mory

It was the authority of a charismatic founder that was not disputed. I don't know if it was uncontested. It could be challenged, but... but it was not challenged. [...] certain things were not questioned.

Within L'Arche, what is the basis for the belief in the legitimacy of J. Vanier's authority? This chapter examines the relationship of authority between the founder and the members in charge in L'Arche. What they have in common is not only that they have exercised authority in the organisation, but also that they are long-standing members who have shown their commitment by a strong, long-term investment, but also, for the most part, by announcing the Covenant¹. Around J. Vanier, they form an emotional community². Borrowed from Max Weber, this expression designates this singular grouping, autonomous from other

1. This chapter does not aim to describe the registers of legitimisation of J. Vanier's authority among *all* the members of L'Arche, nor – a fortiori – among *all the people who had a relationship with him*. The choice to focus on members of L'Arche who were involved in the long term and who had one or more responsibilities in L'Arche is dictated by the purpose of the third section of the report. However, the material we have collected and our findings have been found to resonate with the experience of others who have been involved with him.

2. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Pocket, 1995[1971] p. 322-324.

groupings¹ (family or religious, for example), which is distinguished not only by the affective link that binds the members of L'Arche to J. Vanier, but also by the fact that it is precisely this 'particularly intense' link² that forms the basis of the power relationships that unite them. What representations, narratives and practices establish and sustain the relationship of authority? For the members in charge at L'Arche, what are the facets of charisma that legitimise and give meaning to the authority of J. Vanier?

There are several reasons, revealed in the discursive registers they summon (1). This belief was partly shaped by a particular image of good authority in L'Arche, which J. Vanier himself trained them in, and which the members in charge were invited to reproduce (2). The members in charge bear witness to having difficulties in accepting this relationship of authority, and to negotiations and conflicts that arose in an effort to get out of an asymmetrical relationship of authority, which sometimes led to deleterious enslaving effects (3).

Why does J. Vanier's authority seem legitimate? The discursive registers of a charismatic authority

What was the authority relationship between J. Vanier and the members in charge at L'Arche? Why did these L'Arche members trust him, follow his advice and obey him? A careful study of the accounts by members in charge at L'Arche allows us understand the representations that frame the authority relationship they have with J. Vanier, and that found the belief in the legitimacy of his authority.

The first section of this chapter is based on the study of the corpus of interviews gathered in the course of the survey, in particular 46 interviews conducted with members of L'Arche who had held at least one position of responsibility in L'Arche at the community or international level.

1. Jean-Pierre Grossein, "De l'interprétation de quelques concepts webériens", *Revue française de sociologie*, vol.46 n°4, 2005, p. 688-689.

2. Stephen Kalberg, 'Max Weber's Sociology of Emotions', *Revue du MAUSS*, vol.2, no.40, 2012, pp.285-299.

	Women	Men	Total
TOTAL	26	20	46
<i>With a community leader</i>	25	19	44
<i>With an international* leader</i>	10	10	20
<i>With a member of L'Arche at the time of the interview</i>	20	14	34

* coordinator or vice-coordinator (leader or vice-leader) of the federation or region/zone/country

44 interviewees were leaders of 19 different communities, in 9 countries, on 5 continents. They have held their responsibilities from 1969 to the present. At the time of the interview, 6 were serving at community or international level. 23 (50%) have been in charge for less than 10 years, 15 (32%) between 10 and 20 years, 8 for more than 20 years.

While the analysis is based on this specific corpus, it is informed by the rest of the survey material (other interviews, books, testimonial texts, archives, correspondence) and by numerous informal exchanges in France and Canada¹.

Generally speaking, the interviews reveal unanimous feelings of admiration and affection for J. Vanier: he is a "master" who "impresses" and who is "looked upon with great respect", he is sometimes referred to as a "father" or a "brother"², more rarely as a "friend"³. With the exception of four leaders interviewed, two of whom are currently in office, the institutional career in L'Arche and the personal relationship with J. Vanier are closely intertwined. The accounts attest to the dynamics centrality of the inter-individual relationship with J. Vanier, whether it pre-existed or developed concomitantly with their career in the organisation. The lexical fields of the affective relationship and the work relationship are combined. The interviews also reveal a shared sense of

1. See the presentation of the Commission's survey methodology in the annex.

2. In this chapter based on the in-depth analysis of interviews, each word in brackets is taken from one or more interviews. In order to simplify the chapter, we do not systematically include a note for each word. However, we emphasise when it was used frequently in the interviews. The expressions placed in this sentence for example: interview 24, anonymous, 17, 57, 43, 28.

3. For example, a manager from a younger generation than J. Vanier said in an interview that he would not "allow himself to be called a friend" Interview 113.

indebtedness to J. Vanier, insisting on his crucial role in their personal, professional and spiritual paths:

“But you know we were made by Jean [laughs]. For the greater part, not exclusively, but for the greater part. We owe a lot to Jean!”

Last but not least, for all of them, J. Vanier revealed himself in the course of the relationship as a person with a “great charisma”, an “aura”, a “strength of conviction” and a capacity for “strong influence”, for “having a hold on people”, for “natural authority”².

Why, in a situation of responsibility in L'Arche, do we trust the words, positions or actions of J. Vanier, why do we obey his incitements or advice? The analysis of the interviews reveals three main discursive registers, and then three secondary registers, which indicate as many reasons for believing in the legitimacy of his authority.

THREE MAIN REGISTERS

Register 1: The prophet

The first discursive register is that of J. Vanier's prophetic character. The title of “prophet” was given to him in interviews by two former leaders³. For the L'Arche members we met, J. Vanier is both the one who announces a message of revelation and a mediator of the divine will. According to a shared image, J. Vanier's words and actions are the fruit of an “intuition” that most of the leaders we met consider to be of divine source, even if the fruits of this intuition sometimes appear surprising or “disconnected”⁴ in the eyes of some. They share the conviction that J. Vanier has a special link with the divine: endowed with a “deep faith”, he is “inspired” and “announces the vision” of L'Arche of which he is the “main spiritual inspiration”⁵. His word is ‘pure truth’⁶ and ‘life-giving’⁷.

1. Interview 3

2. Notably interviews 99, anonymous, 24, 46.

3. Interview 58; Interview 32

4. Interview 57

5. These terms are frequently used in the interviews.

6. Interview 92

7. Interview 23

In the accounts of the various experiences, it appears that J. Vanier is, first and foremost, the one who brought a new and unique message, and that listening or reading it has provoked a real revelation in the listener or reader. In other words, J. Vanier operated conversions¹ in many members in charge at L'Arche. Depending on the individual, this conversion can take different shapes: it can be a radical transformation of one's way of life (job, place of living, life goals, affective relationships, etc.), or the immersion in a set of new and unheard-of spiritual beliefs (although of Christian inspiration), or the discovery or re-discovery of a Catholic religious heritage:

“I kept a distance from anything religious and spiritual. [...] I was very impressed by the conference that Jean gave and there is something that I experienced there ... he spoke of a sort of touch of the absolute... And so all this touched me because I was in a quest, personally, philosophically, and there it seemed that it was something concrete... But it was purely personal [...] there was something that touched me. [...] Jean was talking about the Gospels that I had put aside! I mention this because my encounter with Jean was profoundly restructuring in terms of my faith and motivating in terms of the direction of my life”².

Many emphasise how J. Vanier's discourse echoed their personal experience, as shown in the following two quotes, which are similar to many others from the in interviews:

“His book echoed everything I already had in me... everything I had in me already. It clicked. [...] And, yes, when I had the book in my hands, it fascinated me because it said what I had inside me”³.

“He put into words what I was experiencing. It was as if he was someone who had already lived the journey and gave meaning to my experience, well, a broader meaning, precisely in this quest to deepen my relationship with God”⁴.

1. Coming from the religious and philosophical lexicon, the word “conversion” has a broader and more secular meaning in the social sciences: it designates any form of radical individual transformation of identity and way of life, whether or not it takes place on religious grounds. Muriel Darmon. “Sociology of conversion. Socialisation et transformations individuelles”, in C. Burton-Jeangros, C. Maeder (eds.). *Identity and transformation of lifestyles*, Seismo, 2011, p.64-84

2. Anonymous interview. Six people quoted in this chapter chose to be quoted anonymously. They are referenced in the interview table.

3. Interview 58

4. Interview 17

There are many accounts of how members were 'touched' by J. Vanier's message. Beyond the content of the message, it is also the attitude and behaviour of the messenger that marks the listeners:

"Jean came and sat on the floor and started talking and I stood there with my mouth wide open for the whole time, all of it... I couldn't believe it. This man was so beautiful and calm. Gentle, kind, deep...I was gripped by him¹."

The following interview extract is an example of how the belief in the legitimacy of J. Vanier's prophetic authority works:

"He wasn't trying to convince you, he had this deep faith, this strength of conviction. [silence] Yes, he talked about what he was experiencing. [...] There was something deeply human [laughs]. He was listened to because when he spoke, he spoke of humanity [hesitation] He spoke of humanity, and of God in our humanity, so it spoke to us. You could only listen, you didn't have to agree with everything. But also, I think, because his way was not imposing. And also he was someone who could talk easily about certain weaknesses and you could relate to them, you see, he was not a guru. [...] He could talk about his fears, his doubts, his anxieties [...] in his conferences or in his retreats, and so it spoke to people, it reached them: if J. Vanier can be anxious, then I can too, it's not something negative [...] I don't doubt the fact that he was really led by the Holy Spirit. [...] He really let himself be led by the Holy Spirit, and he was really faithful to the Holy Spirit it seems to me. That's how I see it. [...] certain decisions that Jean took or certain actions, one could say to oneself that it was a crazy confidence in the Holy Spirit, or a crazy intuition. But one could also say that... he was taking the place of the Holy Spirit, or perhaps he was anticipating him? [laughter] I don't have an answer to that, but I have both living inside me [laughs]. For many things [...] Jean never gave his intention and I am not sure that he knew either; he had intuitions [...] somewhere, Jean trusted the Holy Spirit [...] and I trusted Jean²."

This extract shows both the conviction of the divine inspiration of J. Vanier's words, decisions and actions and a feeling of asymmetry. In the eyes of this person, J. Vanier is a superior being, who is recognised not only for his culture, training and intelligence (see register 4), but above all for his precedence in relation to the divine. In accordance with

1. Interview 62
2. Anonymous

a relationship to the world structured by religious belief, this precedence distinguishes J. Vanier in the eyes of this member and is one of the implicit arguments which give birth to the asymmetry of the relationship. In this interview excerpt, we underline the sentence on the divinisation of J. Vanier: although formulated a bit as a joke, the remark seems to us to point to the place that the prophetic figure of J. Vanier occupied in the eyes of this member. In this perspective, any presentation or speech by J. Vanier that mentions his 'weakness' or 'poverty', i.e. points of vulnerability or shortcomings in his relationship with the divine, encourages the listener to develop a feeling of admiration towards him. The exposure of the humble humanity of the 'great man' reinforces the conviction of his superiority and acts as an additional element of legitimisation. In other words: these speeches authorise and consolidate the audience's confidence in his authority.

Moreover, the speeches made in interviews allow us to observe regular shifts by which J. Vanier, prophet and servant of the divine, becomes himself a divine incarnation. From believing that he transmits a divine message to considering that he is himself divine, in his person, there is a step that some of the members in charge implicitly cross. In discourse, God and his messenger sometimes tend to be confused:

"So Jean spoke up. And [silence] I met Jesus. Plain and simple. And I mean, I was deeply moved, we were deeply moved¹."

"His presence was so powerful in terms of preaching the word and it was like...Jesus...seemed to be embodied in him, you know, he spoke in such a genuine way it seemed. And I was really drawn in...and he seemed to understand my heart. He could talk about love and...he just understood me, I could feel it, even though I was sitting in the back row during the whole thing. And I didn't talk to him at all, but he impacted me, you know, with his words and with his inspiration, to live²."

The work of Jean-Pierre Bastian, and before him that of Max Weber, sheds light from the point of view of the social sciences on the prophetic character of J. Vanier, as it appears in the accounts of the leaders. Distinct from both the priest, "an official of a cult intended to honour a

1. Interview 66
2. Interview 92

deity”, and the sorcerer, who “acts on supra-natural forces by magical means”, the prophet is “an innovator who proclaims a ground-breaking truth” in the name of a “personal revelation”¹. In the eyes of the members in charge that we met, J. Vanier’s word seems legitimate not because of his specific rational knowledge, his capacity to transmit a conceptualised religious thought or an ethical doctrine (which, according to Jean-Pierre Bastian, is the characteristic of a priest figure), but first of all because there is a shared belief in the fact that he carries a revelation.

Register 2: The personal, confident and confirming guide

The legitimacy of J. Vanier’s authority is based on an interpersonal bond of trust. The second register of legitimisation in the interviews is commensurate with the intensity and frequency of the exchanges between the member in charge and the founder. Therefore, while this register is strongly present in the accounts of founding members and leaders during the first three decades of L’Arche, particularly in France and Canada, but also at the international level, it is absent both from interviews with leaders of communities that are less central in the geography of L’Arche, and from current leaders.

This second register of legitimisation is characterised by the following aspects. Firstly, J. Vanier seems to have paid special attention to each and every person². He seems to have made himself reliably available to them: “When he was needed, he answered”³. Secondly, J. Vanier’s words are authoritative because the founder seems to have a singular capacity (“gift” or “charisma”) to “analyse”, to “help people

1. “The prophet is an absolutely personal bearer of a charisma who, by virtue of his mission, announces a religious doctrine or a divine order. There is no fundamental difference in the fact that he announces in a new way an old or supposedly old revelation, or a completely new word: he can be a founder of a religion or a reformer... [...] What is decisive is the personal vocation. Bastian Jean-Pierre, “De l’autorité prophétique...”, *op.cit.*, p.191-193.

2. We repeat: this statement applies to the extent of J. Vanier’s travels around the world, but also to the extent of L’Arche’s growth. If J. Vanier seems to have been able to meet personally with all the community leaders in the 1980s for example (on the occasion of a visit to the community, a visit to Trosly, a retreat, an event for the leaders), this is no longer the case two decades later.

3. Anonymous

get back on their feet”¹, to “grasp the personality of the person in front of you”, to “enter into your problem”²:

“He had this ability to look at me, I think it wasn’t just me, I think it was an ability he had, to look at me and see abilities in me that I could hardly believe I had, or that I hardly dared, yet, act on. You know, he had this ability to call people to something beyond themselves you know. It’s an extraordinary gift. Really³.”

We see in this extract that the theme of trust is omnipresent in the stories: for many, J. Vanier is the one who trusted them, but he is also the one in whom they placed their trust. Many members emphasised in interviews the intensity of their personal relationship with J. Vanier, particularly during the periods in which they were in a position of responsibility (of the community, for example). The accounts present the relationship of mutual trust as the principle (justification) and the end (intention) of the authority relationship between them and J. Vanier. The idea of ‘trust’ is presented as the foundation of the authority relationship. As we will see later in this chapter, this echoes Vanier’s teaching on the subject, for whom trust is precisely the “heart” of the authority relationship.

How was this personal bond of trust built between J. Vanier and each one of the members in charge? The existence of an intense and privileged personal relationship with the founder is not self-evident in an international organisation, especially during the first decades of L’Arche when neither the mobile phone, nor the smartphone, nor the internet were part of the ordinary tools of communication. With the exception of a handful of cases, the members in charge that we interviewed did not live in close proximity to J. Vanier on a daily basis. Consequently, the latter’s attentive presence was manifested mainly in two ways: through active correspondence, through meeting times in pairs, and more rarely through telephone exchanges. The extent and features of J. Vanier’s correspondence have already been presented in the sixth chapter of the report. Therefore, we choose to focus here on the moments of

1. Interview 58

2. Interview 57

3. Interview 78

inter-individual meetings. These meetings, which are more or less brief, take place when J. Vanier visits the community in which the member lives, or when the member is staying in Trosly, or on the occasion of an event (retreat, Interlude, International Federation, etc.) or a meeting linked to the governance of L'Arche (directors' meetings, etc.¹). Because of the growing number of communities, Jean's visits to far-flung communities were infrequent and became progressively rarer, especially during the last decade of his life.

The moments of exchange with J. Vanier are called "accompaniment" by the members in charge that we met, but their nature is unclear, including for the members themselves. For the leaders, the double accompaniment, "community" (by an elder or a peer in the community) and "spiritual" (by a cleric or a consecrated person, in L'Arche, or outside nowadays) is a frequent practice until the present, it seems. The definition and content of personalised accompaniment by J. Vanier are heterogeneous and seem to have depended above all on the expectations and preferences of his interlocutors.

For some of them, the personal exchanges with J. Vanier were "community accompaniment", i.e. they dealt with the challenges posed by the exercise of community leadership, whether they were operational, managerial, administrative or relational. These members remember that J. Vanier was "supportive" and "confirming"² towards them, formulating words of validation for initiatives, attitudes and decisions taken in the framework of their missions of responsibility:

"He is very supportive. [...] He supports me, he supports me in the way I move forward, in the way I deal with the case [...] He was extremely supportive, confident, interesting³."

This attitude seems to have sometimes caused some leaders embarrassment in front of their peers⁴. Many claim to have sought his advice on their professional options in L'Arche:

1. Interview 40

2. Anonymous interviews; anonymous

3. Interview 57

4. Interview 17. "When I was in authority roles, he was always confirming. Besides, I didn't really like it either, precisely because he confirmed me too much..."

"When I told Jean that I was thinking of putting down my name for this role, Jean said: 'I will support you'. [...] 'I will support you and you can ask me questions and I will help you'. And so in a way, that gave me enough confidence to say yes¹."

On the other hand, others explained that they did not wish to discuss matters relating to the exercise of their community responsibilities with him and that they rather relied on his listening and advice for their relational and emotional problems:

"I could talk to Jean about difficulties on a human level, you know, and on a relational level. But at the structural level, it was not Jean I was asking. [...] He was very present personally, that is to say, he did personal accompaniment [hesitation]. But he didn't interfere too much, or he was careful not to interfere too much with... I wouldn't have asked him... yes, I shared with him issues about the board of directors... but it was more with [X] or with [Y] if you like, one shouldn't mix things up either. And Jean was quite emotional, so I had to be careful not to fall. I could have obtained things from Jean which... I needed to be challenged, and it wasn't Jean who was going to challenge me [laughs], he was going to support me, you see²."

For others, finally, the meetings with J. Vanier were first and foremost a form of spiritual guidance:

"It wasn't about doctrine, dogma, or the right way of thinking, but it was about encouragement, deepening, listening and believing in God's love for me and so on³."

Over time, J. Vanier was able to slip from one type of accompaniment to another, or to offer spiritual, personal and professional accompaniment at the same time, thus adding to the confusion about purpose and boundaries in the accompaniment relationship. The following extract, taken from an interview with a founder and later a community leader, bears witness to this vagueness in the definition of the purpose and boundaries of accompaniment by J. Vanier:

"Over time, I called it accompaniment because L'Arche had a culture of accompaniment."

1. Interview 69

2. Anonymous

3. Interview 78

Q: Accompanying what?

We didn't put [the word] spiritual at the end. Many years later, I added the word spiritual to it. He didn't impose it on me. I didn't call it that at the time. But in fact, that's what it was. It was afterwards that I used the word, spiritual accompaniment. [...] And then Jean, it was also a community accompaniment, but it had to do with the spiritual life too. I was talking about prayer, of course. Prayer in the home, prayer, God's will for me in a way, and my vocation.

Did you also share your questions about your life choices?

[Yes [...] I thought of naming Jean as a spiritual counsellor later on. I even deigned to call him a spiritual father once. [silence] Yes, as a spiritual father, father of my soul in a way. Someone who... who embodied, well, how I wanted to be when I was going to grow up [laughs] but I'll never be "big" like him... And with him, I spoke of more intimate things, in terms of prayer, he referred me to readings, he spoke of Little Flower of Jesus [the little Thérèse of Lisieux]."

This person explains that she also shared her intimate and personal history with J. Vanier. With his help and within L'Arche, she is making progress in her personal building, distancing herself from her family history, and "discovering things about [herself]". Finally, she asked J. Vanier about her professional career choices in L'Arche on several occasions:

"I didn't feel up to it, but I remember writing to Jean telling him about this conversation and asking for his advice, so to speak. To which he replied, "Follow the motions of the Holy Spirit and pay attention. And then, when I saw him, he said "You know where I am and that's it". But he didn't pronounce himself. "

About a later choice, a decade later:

"I had asked Jean the question, saying: from what you know about me [...] And he had said to me "Think carefully", he had not given the answer either, but he had said "Ask the Holy Spirit, think carefully because you are very whole". And I said: "This is what I feel too¹".

1. The entire passage is from the same interview (99).

For our analysis, this case has the interest of showing not only how the issues addressed to J. Vanier for his advice fit into each other, but also how register 2 (Jean as a trusting and confirming guide) fits into register 1 (Jean as a prophet): having asked J. Vanier on several occasions about professional choices in L'Arche, she only retains his spiritual advice (listening to God). We note the mention of Jean's "greatness", which refers to register 4, of which we talk below. The link between register 1 and register 2 is also visible in the way some members in charge describe J. Vanier's trust in them:

"Jean always saw in me, had absolute trust in me¹."

But also:

"He's someone who knew how to trust people, so maybe that was [laughs] also associated with a certain madness in that trust²."

In both of these quotations, the reference to the "absoluteness" and "foolishness" of Vanier's trust is not ironic but complimentary. It borrows from an ordinary Christian language and perspective in which the "foolishness" of an act, attitude or word can be interpreted as a sign of holiness and election by God³. In turn, J. Vanier's "absolute" trust is an indication of his holiness, his divine election, but also a sign for the election of the member in charge.

The description in this second register of legitimisation of authority in J. Vanier leads to several conclusions. First, in many cases, the relationships involve affectivity. Second, the inter-personal relationships between J. Vanier and the members in charge are reciprocal but asymmetrical. The two parties do not contribute in the same way and do not provide similar types of content. The two protagonists are not in a relationship of equivalence, as the interaction patterns show. In their accounts, members emphasise how J. Vanier listens, confirms, supports, is understanding, sometimes gives "good advice⁴", but

1. Anonymous

2. Interview 57

3. "The foolish things of the world, these God has chosen to confuse the wise. 1 Cor 1:28

4. Interview 62

rarely gives a precise answer to the questions asked by his interlocutors¹ and speaks little:

“Jean expressed things without going into details, so we had to try to understand what he was saying reading between the lines. But for me, this proved to be extremely judicious and fortunate².”

In the context of accompaniment, did J. Vanier sometimes express a clear-cut position, did he assert his disagreement? Could he be insistent? The excerpts above, reflecting the majority of the accounts gathered, allow us to answer in the negative. Many of them confirm that they “never felt any pressure to do anything, to live anything”, that they never felt that a decision was imposed on them (“He never said ‘you must’, never”³) and that they felt “free”⁴. In some cases, however, J. Vanier gives his opinion and indicates the decision to be taken. The analysis of the interviews shows that this happens in two types of situations: first, in relation to the discernment of a “call” – which refers to the prophetic register:

“And he said, ‘I don’t think so’. He sort of said, ‘I’m not sure it’s a call’. And I felt a bit devastated, but I respected his wisdom. So I didn’t go. And now I can look back on it and say it certainly made sense. I don’t think I would have known how to do it. I probably would have been crushed trying to do it. But it was an example. He was very clear: ‘no, you’re not doing that’⁵.”

Secondly, in human relationships with friends, family or lovers, particularly when they could impact engagement or commitment in L’Arche. Some members tell of having given up participating in a major family event or of having postponed or modified a personal decision concerning their love life, on the advice of J. Vanier, in order to better devote themselves to their missions in L’Arche⁶. Although these cases

1. A frequent statement in interviews. For example 62

2. Interview 58

3. For example interview 62

4. For example interview 46

5. Interview 92

6. However, we would qualify this advice by saying that it is not systematic. It seems that J. Vanier sometimes recommended taking time for family life, in the case of the death of a parent for example.

are not very frequent, they are a sign that the personal relationship of trust may have taken the form of an ascendancy and a bond of dependence between J. Vanier and the members who seek him out on all aspects of their lives.

Finally, if the diversity of the issues seeking support through relationship testifies to J. Vanier’s capacity to adapt to his interlocutors, it also highlights the fact that he was considered by his interlocutors as a guide capable of grasping and supporting all forms of problems, across the board. There is no account of a situation in which J. Vanier expressed a feeling of incompetence or declined a request for support. There seems to be an illusion of shared omniscience in this respect:

“I said ‘Jean, you’re not a forthcoming person’. That’s a way of saying you don’t reveal yourself very much! And I said, ‘It’s frustrating, isn’t it? I ask you a question and I see you thinking, thinking: what can I say, what can’t I say?’ And his answer was ‘You’re right, you’re right, George’. And he said to me ‘maybe it’s because I know too much’. That was his answer! [I know too much’ [...]]”

What are the effects of the mobilisation of this register of personal trust in the relationship of authority that links J. Vanier to the members in charge? These relationships are experienced as privileged. They foster a sense of election and are a mark that distinguishes them from the other members of L’Arche. The difficulty of the conditions under which these meetings are held contributes to their symbolic weight. The signs of attention from J. Vanier, even in difficult moments of personal or community life, are noted attentively by the members who see in them, each time, the manifestation of their privileged personal link with the founder and the mark of their election. As a result, not being accompanied personally by J. Vanier or not having the opportunity to meet him individually can be difficult for some members, who interpret it as a form of discrediting their investment in L’Arche, or even as a visible sign of their lesser recognition by the group (by J. Vanier, but also by those who surround him and organise his agenda, his meetings, his activities, etc.) Of course, this statement applies especially to the

1. Interview 29.

members of L'Arche who go to or are in Trosly (members or international leaders).

Vanier's availability, his listening skills, his tangible personal trust play a crucial role in the development of a relationship of affection, gratitude and loyalty towards him. This second register leads to a practice of 'loyalty in return': since he relies on me, trusts me and supports me, for which I feel gratitude – even flattering my ego – I must in return trust, support and obey him ('welcome his advice and counsel'). By extension, the relationship of personal trust encourages adherence to the L'Arche value system, loyalty to its rules, whether formalised or not, and the adoption of routines (in language, in behaviour).

Register 3: The Founder-Leader's Insight

The third register cited by the members in charge in order to justify the legitimacy of J. Vanier's authority is that of his wisdom and lucidity, the fruit of his experience as "founder" and "leader"¹ – though this second quality is obviously less recognised by the younger members in charge at L'Arche or those who have had less opportunity to work with him. This being said, because he is at least unanimously recognised as a "founder", he is supposed to have prior knowledge of what L'Arche is and what it means, as well as greater knowledge of the issues and problems faced by the organisation. As a result, he is assumed to have more insight and wisdom than anyone else about the L'Arche adventure: what he says "must be right"² and "he must be right"³. He is recognised as having the ability to 'fill in the gaps'⁴. Here, the authority-obedience relationship is based on the recognition by members of two closely related elements: a distinctive status (founder, community director, international leader – see Chapter 11) but also singular qualities of knowledge, insight and wisdom⁵ which appear in the discourses as an attribute of status. These characteristics correspond to the ideal-typical authority figure of the 'leader' as defined by Alexandre Kojève.

1. Numerous interviews including 28, 69

2. Interview 17

3. Interview 23

4. Anonymous

5. Numerous interviews, 17 of which were anonymous.

Recognised as far-sighted, as able to anticipate and foresee, he or she can legitimately take "decisions with a view to the future"¹. This is a form of authority of action (present) and project (future). In the case of J. Vanier, this authority of the "leader" that gives weight to his words and actions is articulated with an "authority of being", which is also that of the "Father" and which is distinguished by having "the authority of the cause, of the author, of the origin and of the source of what is"².

Many express the feeling that the founder-leader always had the best interests of the organisation he himself founded in mind, and express the conviction that he was seeking in all things the growth and success of L'Arche:

"I think that all means were good to create and develop L'Arche"³.

The conviction of the founder-leader's foresight seems to have been shared by J. Vanier himself, who seems not to have hesitated to impose his own views:

"Now Jean, in his wisdom, did not pay attention to these calls if they did not fit his agenda. [...] He had to be pressured to change what he thought were [laughs] his priorities"⁴.

If everyone welcomed and respected J. Vanier's interest in the organisation he initiated, it must be noted that he contributed to legitimising the obedience of all, including at the highest instances of L'Arche, even in cases of misunderstanding or disagreement, as chapter 11 showed⁵. Indeed, the belief in J. Vanier's clairvoyance led to his being considered the "final reference", the "final authority"⁶ and to acting in accordance with what "Jean said". *In retrospect*, some people deplore a certain "passivity": "In the end, people give up many things, including themselves, for a good cause, and then we follow⁷...".

1. Claire Oger, *Faire référence. La construction de l'autorité dans le discours des institutions*, Paris, Editions de l'EHESS, 2021, p.38.

2. François Terré, in Alexandre Kojève, *La notion de l'autorité*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004, p.44.

3. Interview 64

4. Anonymous

5. Interview 66

6. Anonymous

7. Interview 64

The importance of this register of legitimisation, particularly true during the first three decades of L'Arche, has gradually diminished. While the wisdom and insight of the founder-leader is not questioned by the most recent members in charge that we met, there is no longer any question of considering J. Vanier as the "ultimate reference" or of seeking his experience and wisdom on all decisions (see Chapter 11).

Finally, as in the case of register 1, we note that J. Vanier's visible distancing from statutory positions of authority from the second half of the 1970s onwards contributed symbolically to strengthening his authority as founder-leader:

"I found it beautiful in Jean's story that he had the energy, the courage to step down from the role of leader, when he did so. I found that remarkable as a leader and I said to myself, that's beautiful, you know. [...] He was the founder, he was there¹."

SECONDARY REGISTERS AND INSTITUTIONAL VALIDATIONS

The three main registers of legitimisation of the authority relationship put forward by the members in charge to justify J. Vanier's authority are those of his prophetic role, his personal confidence and his foresight as founder. Of course, other more immediate elements play a role in the authority relationship: J. Vanier is a man, he is tall, he is Canadian and there is a significant age gap with almost all the leaders². However, the accounts from the interviews invoke other complementary elements of speech that are skilfully articulated to these first ones.

Register 4: The exceptional man with remarkable qualities

In the stories, J. Vanier is a man out of the ordinary, "the only one of his kind", with whom "no one can interact"³:

"I mean, what we received from him remains huge, what he gave to L'Arche, to the Church, to the world remains huge... And that I am convinced of⁴."

1. Interview 99
2. Interview 58
3. Interview 99
4. Interview 3

For the members in charge, the signs of his superiority over the other men and women of his time are first of all visible in his impressive capacity for work, particularly his capacity for writing (frequency, success, number of publications, correspondence), the large number of retreats and lectures, his incessant travels around the world, and his capacity to invest himself not only in his primary work, L'Arche, but also in other related works, such as the Faith and Light movement¹.

"Jean was someone – well, as I knew him, because I realise that there was something else behind him that I didn't see – everything he experienced was already so enormous: he went to bed at midnight, he met people until half past eleven, every quarter of an hour, well, in the evening, a little longer. And then he would get up at 6 o'clock, so he had very short nights. He was travelling all the time with different schedules, jet lag, food, beds...²"

Some accounts thus bear witness to a sometimes mythicized image, both superhuman (he is above men) and sacrificial (entirely "offered", "devoted", "at the service of the mission"). Taken together, these two characteristics fit into the most traditional perspective on charismatic leadership and reinforce the Christ-like image that some members in charge of L'Arche project onto their founder – already highlighted above.

Secondly, in the stories, J. Vanier is praised as a man of rare intelligence. He is "skilful", "diplomatic", able to have "a very broad vision", with "a major organisational capacity"; he is "an intellectually curious man", with "great intelligence", "quite sharp, very quick", and "lucid"³. In a word, he is a gifted man:

"He had many talents and he was very gifted, very gifted. [...] He had the intelligence required for studying [...] He had such good memory! Very, very good memory. And I can tell you... [laughs] for example, when he gave the retreats, he never had notes, never. And in fact, this was something that made him proud, he was proud of it⁴."

Finally, the members attach importance to his social position. This meant for them his degree (a doctorate), his previous professional

1. Anonymous
2. Interview 58
3. Numerous interviews including: anonymous, 24, 43, 29, 57
4. Interview 29

activities (university teaching, military career), his 'status' and 'stature', but also his family ancestry. In particular, the illustrious personality of his father (Canadian ambassador to France, Governor General in Canada), and by extension that of his mother (wife of the Governor General), but also sometimes that of his sister Thérèse, the first female paediatrician in the United Kingdom. All this left its mark and emphasized his prestige adding to the feeling of asymmetry with the members in charge, in Canada, in France, and elsewhere. One community founder remembers:

"Everywhere we went, it was "Ah, I knew your mother! [laughs]. I used to make fun of him all the time because it was every time: "I knew your mother...", I mean...Yes, yes, General Vanier, Pauline Vanier, they are personalities!"

Finally, this register, on the topic of legitimisation of J. Vanier's authority, again puts forward the same trend we have already pointed out: all forms of masking or rejection of his dominant social position (through his 'poor' lifestyle, his 'simple' or 'unkempt' style of dress, his 'humble' choices of accommodation, his 'modest' tastes, his choices of games, etc.), far from making J. Vanier invisible to the members of L'Arche who surround him, contribute on the contrary to increase his prestige and reinforce admiration for him:

"I think it's great that this guy who spent all this time in the navy, and then, who has his doctorate and all that, that he's able, he's so free [...] I think it's incredible."

*Register 5: An incarnation of the ideal L'Arche member.
Holiness, consistency, fidelity.*

For members in charge at L'Arche that we met, it seems that J. Vanier embodies a kind of "ideal"³: he is an example of what it means to be a good and true member of L'Arche, he is an ideal towards which many wish to strive. Following his example, a model L'Arche member can distinguish himself by his life choices as well as by his speech, that is

1. Anonymous

2. Interview 29

3. Several times mobilised in interviews.

to say, "given himself up" – to work in L'Arche, to his brothers and sisters in L'Arche, and eventually to Christ.

In addition, many emphasise qualities of sincerity, authenticity and truth. "Transparent" and "faithful", J. Vanier appears as the image of coherence: he does what he says, he says what he does.

"He appeared to me as someone who lived what he was talking about. Huh, he walked the talk, [as they say] in English [...] What he was talking about seemed to fit with what he was living. [...] I looked at him as a Christian, a Christian Catholic, ideal, well ideal; I mean who "walked the talk!"

The importance of institutional validation marks, especially Catholic ones

Finally, the accounts we studied occasionally mention symbolic elements derived from institutional validation. If J. Vanier's words and actions are referred to and followed by the members in charge of L'Arche, it is also because they hear and are sensitive to the acknowledgment of his authority by legitimate institutions: public institutions, religious institutions. Chapter 5 of the report has shown that even before the foundation of L'Arche, J. Vanier had a reputation for sanctity.

The interviews underline the fact that J. Vanier was an "international personality", "he was invited everywhere"², "receiving honours from politicians at the highest level of political representation, in several countries. In France, for instance, several members during the interviews recalled that they had been impressed when "he was awarded medals by Jacques Chirac, by Manuel Valls, by Balladur (1993)" or was "awarded the Legion of Honour (Commander of the Legion of Honour in 2015)"³. In North America, where his fame goes back furthest in time and is the most important, members in charge recall that J. Vanier received numerous honours, not only from state and federal institutions⁴, but also in the

1. Interview 99

2. Anonymous; Anonymous

3. Interview 46

4. In chronological order, J. Vanier was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1971, a Companion of the Order of Canada in 1986, and a Grand Officer of the National Order of Quebec in 1992.

academic field¹. In the United Kingdom, for example, he received the Golden Jubilee Medal from Queen Elizabeth II in 2002 and the Diamond Jubilee Medal from her in 2012. In Canada, schools were named after him during his lifetime². In 2010, asteroid 8604 was even named “Vanier” in his honour³.

Beyond that, it is the institutional distinctions awarded by religious institutions, in particular Catholic ones, that seem to have particularly marked the minds of the members: some recall the prestigious *Templeton* Prize, awarded to J. Vanier in 2015, others the Paul VI Prize awarded earlier to J. Vanier in 1997. Many other prizes are awarded by religious institutions, notably the American Catholic prize, such as the *Pacem in Terris* prize in 2013, the Canadian Catholic prize, such as the *Gaudium et Spes* prize, which he was the first lay person to receive in 2005⁴, or the Jewish and Canadian prize, such as the *Rabbi Gunther Plaut* prize. Each of these awards requires the careful preparation of a file, often including letters of support from prominent figures. Among the members we met, several were actively involved in the preparation of these applications. Let's not leave out the fact that teams of L'Arche members rallied en masse during the second half of the 2000s, and for almost a decade, to complete J. Vanier's application for the Nobel Peace Prize. The application was submitted several times but was never successful.

In the medical-social sector, in politics, in North American academia, in religious circles, first and foremost in the Catholic Church, J. Vanier is a well-known figure.

For many, ecclesiastical institutional validation played an important role and strongly contributed to the legitimacy of Vanier's authority in their eyes:

1. Honorary doctorate awarded by Avé Maria University; St Michael's College; Notre-Dame-Du-Lac University (Indiana, USA) awarded a first prize to J. Vanier in 1994, followed in 2014 by the Ford Family Prize; etc. See also chapter 5.

2. For example, the J. Vanier Catholic High School founded in 1992 in Welland, Ontario. But also in Whitehorse, Yukon; London, Ontario; Scarborough, Ontario; Collingwood, Ontario; Hamilton, Ontario; Richmond Hill, Ontario...

3. [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/\(8604\)_Vanier](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/(8604)_Vanier)

4. This award is given by the “Order of the Knights of Columbus”, which has a strong presence in Canada.

“Jean was still a landmark in the Church, well in Christianity¹.”

This Catholic institutional validation has all the more effect as the overwhelming majority of people in charge in L'Arche declare that they belong to the Catholic religion and therefore value it². The complicated relationship between J. Vanier and the ecclesiastical institutions, described in particular in chapter 3, is unknown to them. They are all convinced of the “very strong” and “unquestionable” links³ between J. Vanier and the Catholic Church – perceived as a homogeneous whole – and closely connect the prophetic mission of the man with the mission of the Catholic Church:

“It's the announcement not only of the vision of L'Arche, but of how the vision of L'Arche was linked to the vision of Jesus in the Gospels. And that was really an important link for many of us in the first generation, that link to the Gospels and to the Church, and to the mission of the [Catholic] Church⁴.”

Besides the “awards” and other symbolic markers, for the members in charge, the ecclesial legitimisation of J. Vanier's authority is visible in many other ways: oral or written messages of support from Catholic dignitaries (among them the Popes), the presence of Catholic priests in several L'Arche communities, the regular flow of seminarians sent for an “internship” to L'Arche communities (for example Belgian or Canadian Jesuits in Tertianship) since the first decade of L'Arche's existence⁵; Catholic clerics going through a personal crisis. In the case of the Trosly community, ecclesial validation is made even more obvious by having the bishop of the diocese appoint the community leader (chapter 11). There are other markers: invitations to preach retreats for clerics and friars (such as the Faith & Sharing retreats from the end of the 1960s onwards), for Church movements stemming in particular from the charismatic renewal. All this emphasizes the validation of

1. Interview 55

2. An internal survey in 2011 shows that 88% of community leaders, national, regional and international coordinators declare themselves to be Catholic. Erik Pillet, “Leaders in L'Arche, a statistical photography”, 2011. Internal document.

3. Interview 43

4. Anonymous

5. Interview 98

J. Vanier's message and of the "mission of salvation" carried by L'Arche. Once again, J. Vanier's distrustful attitude towards this notoriety, of which he was aware, confirmed his moral superiority in the eyes of the members in charge¹.

The interviews conducted with members who have held positions of responsibility in L'Arche allow us to understand the key ways in which J. Vanier's charismatic authority is legitimised. If they are partly emotional, based on trust and belief in the prophetic role of J. Vanier, they are also statutory: the social and symbolic status of the man, the marks of institutional legitimisation from institutions recognised by the members. In the accounts, the motives that underpin trust and obedience to JV (*he is a prophet, a personal guide, clairvoyant, exceptional, a member of the ideal L'Arche, endorsed by the institutions*) all combine. The personal relationship with J. Vanier is intimately intertwined with the professional careers in L'Arche.

But is the construction of this charismatic dominance relationship only the product of the representations of the members of L'Arche? We will now see that J. Vanier played an active role: throughout his prophetic career, he not only actively justified the legitimacy of his charismatic authority, but also trained those in positions of authority in L'Arche to exercise it in their turn.

Authority according to J. Vanier

What did Vanier say and teach about the exercise of authority?

The study of the lectures, training sessions and other "talks" he gave to the members of L'Arche on the theme of authority is essential and enlightening in several respects. Firstly, it is an excellent means of access to the founder's personal position. Secondly, J. Vanier's interventions are one of the tools in the building of authority relationships in L'Arche. Indeed, if many have learnt the exercise of legitimate authority through socialisation or imitation, in L'Arche, it is interesting to

1. One community founder says: "I remember a retreat where he was. He said, 'Stop blowing me. You know what happens to a balloon when you blow it too much, it bursts!' He himself was more or less comfortable with this emphasis that was around him."

observe that the founder developed educational materials to develop a unique concept for command, power and responsibility. As the first artisan of a charismatic authority relationship in L'Arche, J. Vanier regularly intervened to explicitly teach good authority. For 50 years (1966-1950), he gave many teachings on authority to the members of L'Arche in a variety of circumstances: trainings for a specific category of L'Arche members (assistants of "more than one year", or at the "School of Life" in Trosly), spiritual retreats for a group of members (e.g. the "Directors' Retreat"), Carrefours, International Federations, Interludes¹ ... By its recurrence, the subject appears to have been crucial for J. Vanier.

J. Vanier's teaching on authority has spread beyond the borders of L'Arche, notably through works such as *La communauté lieu du pardon et de la fête*, published in 1979 in French and English² and subsequently republished several times until 2012. These books set out the main elements of the approach to authority developed by J. Vanier³. Archival documents reveal that passages from these books on authority were used as a basis for J. Vanier's interventions on this theme – but also for those of other members of L'Arche (Doc_AJ). Moreover, the founder was regularly invited to teach authority by Christian groups, some of them close to L'Arche (Faith & Light)⁴. Finally, J. Vanier is not the only one to have lectured on the theme of authority within L'Arche. But it is remarkable that he was not only the main speaker on this theme, but also that other speakers from L'Arche or related organisations

1. The Interludes or Renewals are training-retreat events lasting from 1 to 3 months, depending on the period of L'Arche's history, for experienced members of L'Arche who have responsibilities in the organisation. These events welcome leaders from all over the world, by invitation of the organisers, with their families.

2. For the English language reference: J. Vanier, *Community and Growth: Our pilgrimage together*, Griffin House, 1979.

3. See in particular the 6th chapter of the book entitled "The Gift of Authority".

4. For a recent example in Faith and Light, see the 2015 booklet entitled *Carrying Responsibility Together in Faith and Light*, aimed at "those who are responsible (at community, province or international level)". The first article entitled "Becoming a good leader" (p.6-12) is by J. Vanier. Amidst a series of photos of sheep flocks, he outlines the main elements of his approach. AJV.

developed training content by taking up his discourse, or even by submitting their lines of argument to him beforehand¹.

In order to understand the relationship of authority that links J. Vanier with the members in charge at L'Arche, we focus on the teachings that were explicitly intended for them. Between J. Vanier's first 'talk' in 1966 and his last training on the issue of authority in 2016, we have a large body of material that allows us to observe the continuities and evolutions of his approach to what it means to be a 'good' leader, but also to the meaning of authority in L'Arche. The corpus consists of a set of handwritten, typed and audio documents collected in various archival locations in France and Canada, in French and English².

WHAT ARE THE AUTHORITY MODELS?

From 1966 to 2016, J. Vanier used three authority figures to whom he gave similar characteristics: the educator, the father and the shepherd.

1. For a recent example in L'Arche: two leaders asked J. Vanier in 2012 to define the singularity of the exercise of authority in L'Arche, with a view to feeding a collective reflection. For a recent example outside of L'Arche, in 2010 the training material "Living Authority as followers of Jesus", produced for an international training session of Faith and Light, was submitted to J. Vanier by its author for "suggestions for improvement". APJV.

2. The precise list of the corpus studied in this section of the chapter can be found in the sources of the report. The corpus was compiled from archival documents (APJV and AJV). We have handwritten notes by J. Vanier, either in preparation for or as a support for his oral interventions, typed transcriptions of his interventions, but also articles written by him based on one of his interventions, with the help of others, which were then published in booklets by L'Arche. These documents are in French or English. If most of the writings we have were written for events in Trosly or in France, we recall that some training or retreat times, but especially the Interludes or the International Federations, always bring together members of L'Arche from different communities and different countries. The scope of these training sessions therefore goes far beyond the 'Franco-Trosly' circle. The documents date from 1966 (for the oldest) to 2016 (for the most recent). The coverage of the period is uneven: we have more documents for the 1980s and have not been able to consult any documents between 1998 and 2007, although archive holdings and interviews have mentioned their existence. Despite this gap, we consider that the analysis of the material in our possession is valid: on the one hand, the consultation of the documents reveals a remarkable continuity of discourse between the beginning and the end of the period; on the other hand, we were able to consult documents from all (or almost all) of the configurations of J. Vanier's training interventions in L'Arche

The figure of the educator

For J. Vanier, every person in charge must possess the "three types of authority that are manifested in [the] lives of educators" (doc_A). In reality, it is not so much a question of models of authority as of the fields in which it is exercised. The first is minor and concerns the maintenance of order and discipline. The second relates to the creation and maintenance of a 'group spirit'. The third dimension of the educator's authority is the concern for the growth of the persons under his responsibility: "The educator looks after the person as a whole. He seeks to prepare him to lead a full and happy human life" (doc_B). The formula is challenging because of its ambition: the field of exercise of the authority of the person in charge is vast and possibly limitless. The two other figures of authority will allow us to specify the scope of this ambition. In the words of J. Vanier, the figure of the educator is summoned to say something about all inter-individual authority relationships in L'Arche, not just the one between "assistants" and "core members" (people with disabilities), as the following extract shows:

"The educator must become the friend of every boy. In this way he must acquire personal authority through dialogue. Here we touch the summit of education. The teacher must not only maintain discipline, be the defender of the law, create a spirit, an atmosphere, but must also know how to enter into a personal dialogue with the child. This implies that the child takes him as a confidant. He comes to him with his difficulties, his failures, when he is down in the dumps he comes to be comforted...when he has problems he comes to find help [...] in short he has confidence in him, he takes him as an authority for his inner and personal life. (Doc_A)"

Delivered in 1966, this speech gathers themes that are found throughout Vanier's teaching, albeit with modifications in language¹.

Firstly, authority is seen as the result of the personal qualities of the individual in a position of responsibility or command:

"In fact, in order to maintain discipline, you need [...] an estimable, strong personality that commands respect. [...] the educator must be the one who knows how to handle a group, create a group spirit, an atmosphere. In this way he becomes a radiant being. (Doc_B)"

1. For example, the reference to "boys" when talking about people in care was considered condescending and disappeared in the following decade.

The figure of the educator allows J. Vanier to highlight a series of human qualities and relational skills required for this profession: the ability to listen, availability, support towards autonomy, educational or restorative assistance, and the concern to establish a relationship of trust. Authority is obtained by gift or acquired through self-transformation (“we are all on the way to personal authority” doc_A), and the authority relationship is played out exclusively in the inter-individual relationship. But the description includes an additional dimension that is crucial in J. Vanier’s perspective: if the relationship of authority is a relationship of help and accompaniment, it must be above all a relationship of friendship. The role of the person in charge is to be the “confidant” of the person under his or her responsibility; he or she is invited to exercise authority over the sentimental, emotional and spiritual life of the persons under his or her responsibility. This affirmation does not prevent J. Vanier from warning against the risks of this form of power in his early teachings:

“The fault here: my avoidance of personal contact, fear of deep relationships – it involves too much [...] then one falls into camaraderie, one laughs [...] or else, for lack of emotional balance, one seeks at all costs to elicit confidences, one is indiscreet, one wants to violate the person’s secret. [...] I cannot insist too strongly on a danger in this area. When it comes to the first two types of authority, it is easy to see its successes and failures. But in this 3rd area one can be very wrong (doc_A)”.

During subsequent training sessions, he would regularly come back to the existence of risks and the difficulty of finding the right distance: the relationship of authority must “build the other”, by demonstrating “a personal love that is not POSSESSING but LIBERATING”, seeking “well-being” and “freedom” (doc_P). He sometimes mentions the “DANGER” of “FUSION” and “EMPOWERMENT” (doc_P), but without ever providing specific examples, nor framing it within limits, nor even providing the conditions for the distinction between “good” and “bad”: how, for example, not to confuse “POSSESSIVE personal love” and “LIBERATING personal love”?

In short, the ideal-typical figure of the educator is striking because of the individual and affective definition of authority, but also because of the scope over which he or she is invited to exercise authority: education, affective life and interior life at the same time. Over time, the

figure of the educator becomes less used in training courses in favour of the following two figures.

The father figure

The second ideal-typical figure of authority systematically summoned by J. Vanier is the father. It refers mainly to the family father, while occasionally borrowing from the figure of the heavenly father, i.e. God. Inscribed in an ideal-typical form of the father-child relationship, the father’s authority is characterised as follows: “to love”, “to guide”, “to educate”, “to challenge” the child because of the latter’s shortcomings. In relation to the father, the child would be characterised by “his smallness and weakness”, but also by “his psychological fears which lock him in” (doc_N).

At first sight, these traits are similar to those of the educator. However, the father figure is distinguished by several unique features. First of all, the father-child authority relationship is presented by J. Vanier as an experience that is both primordial and universal, against which all other subsequent experiences of authority are constructed:

“The way we exercise authority relates to how we experienced the first authority we had. And the very first authority we had was that of our mother and father. It’s obvious that if we experienced very difficult things in our childhood...for example, I accompanied a young woman, and when I listened to her, I saw that she always had difficulties with men. Either she was very submissive or she was very angry. [...] I suggested to her that she needed to look at her relationship with her father (doc_AC)”.

The mobilisation of the authority figure of the father is accompanied by frequent recourse to the lexical field of the family and, more generally, a consistent use of the lexical field of social ties. The use of this vocabulary underlines one of the objectives of the exercise of authority according to J. Vanier: to ensure the construction of the community body – which must be envisaged and experienced by its members as a “family” – and the maintenance of its “unity”. The importance of primary socialisation in J. Vanier’s discourse, and the way in which the parent-child relationship is used, also echoes the teachings of T. Philippe: “we all began in our mother’s womb” (doc_AC), “the very small child”, etc.

Secondly, the figure of the father allows J. Vanier to reflect on the limitation of the power of those in charge:

“The first experience of authority is that of parents with children. The child is weak and the parents have taken on this responsibility. The basis of authority always involves duality: the father and the mother. One cannot assume authority alone [...] It is a danger to believe that I am the only one to exercise authority. If you exercise authority alone, you become a tyrant, you crush people. You have to know yourself to exercise authority well. (doc_R)”

If J. Vanier affirms that authority must be limited, we observe that the boundaries are not given by the existence of counter-powers, nor by internal or external regulations, nor by a legal framework, nor by means of control or evaluation tools or procedures. Exemplary of many other texts, the above excerpt asserts that the authority relationship is framed and controlled by means of another inter-individual relationship, in which the responsible person would be engaged on his or her side. But is a chain of inter-individual relationships a chain of responsibility? Is peer-to-peer dialogue a form of power sharing? There is a double illusion here.

The frequent use of the image of the parental couple deserves our attention. Through it, J. Vanier conjures up a singular imaginary of the exercise of shared authority. Firstly, the effectiveness of the exercise of authority is said to be based on the “unity between the parents”, but also on their “commitment” and “fidelity” (doc_N). Secondly, implicitly, the image of the parental couple invokes the imaginary of the love relationship. As expected, this imaginary bears the mark of a traditional Catholic perspective, both heteronormative in terms of the parental couple (based on the complementarity of two sexes), and essentialist in its approach to a masculine and feminine nature. On numerous occasions over the decades, Vanier’s statements not only make use of gender stereotypes but also take a differentialist approach to the nature of men and women and their scope and mode of exercising authority¹.

1. For example: “The temptation to do big things is perhaps more present in men than in women. Men are more at ease with organisation, with important and often abstract things. Women are more at ease in relationships, in encounters. J. Vanier, “Our inner journey. Section “The Temptation to Greatness”. L’Arche Family Celebration. International Federation, South Bend, 1982, p.33. AJV

Like the above extract, J. Vanier’s teaching invites the leader to be attentive to himself (“one must know oneself to exercise authority well”). The successful exercise of authority and its control would thus be based on the personal qualities of the leader and his desire to improve himself. From this perspective, his responsibility – but also that of the partner(s) around him – is not so much to a group (members of L’Arche) or a text (constitution, rules, law) as to himself.

Finally, the recourse to the figure of the father, and, in turn, to the parent/child dissymmetry, echoes the recurrent injunction made to the bearer of authority to pay special attention to the frailties, weaknesses and limitations of the people placed under their responsibility. This discourse runs the risk of paternalism.

The figure of the shepherd

The figure of the “good shepherd”, borrowed from biblical texts of the Old and New Testaments, is the third and principal model of authority called upon by J. Vanier. According to the founder, in the image of Christ, the shepherd in L’Arche exercises his authority in four complementary ways¹. First of all, he exercises a guiding function: “he takes his place in front; he leads the flock”. According to this first dimension, the role of the shepherd is to “give DIRECTION, VISION, LIGHT, show the “TRUTH” (doc_N), “the way”.

Secondly, the shepherd develops a “personal relationship” with each member of the flock: “He knows the name of each one”, he shows “compassion, understanding of the wounds, the sufferings of the other”, but also shows “confidence”, “encourages to grow, to make efforts”. It is about “watering the gift. Helping each person to find his or her place”, but also “challenging and helping the other to be coherent”. This second dimension implies, according to J. Vanier, a lot of “LISTENING”, in order to “understand, know the other, not to impose one’s own ideas or desires”.

Thirdly, the figure of the shepherd is sacrificial and, according to J. Vanier, similar to that of the suffering servant of Isaiah: the shepherd

1. If this paragraph is based on the analysis of several training documents from the 1980s and 2007-2010, all words and phrases in brackets are from the same handwritten document (doc_R). Where this is not the case, the reference is indicated. The use of capital letters or underlining respects that of J. Vanier.

must “give his life”, “not for his own glory, prestige”, but in the service of the sheep:

“The good shepherd is ready to give his life for his sheep, he exposes himself. But when he is a hired hand, he flees. The true shepherd has a mandate, he enters through the door, he knows each one by name. He walks at their head to lead them to green pastures. The true shepherd sacrifices his personal interests to safeguard the sheep, the lambs (doc_AC)”

Finally, the authority of the shepherd implies a teaching and transmission role. The leader must “Feed the flock. Feed the people”.

“I have to let this attention, this vigilance rise in me to feed it [= the sheep] properly. By realizing how every word I give can become food, that every person I meet may be the opportunity for a nourishing meeting, and that I can become a true shepherd, I feed people's hearts with my faith, with my trust (doc_E)”.

Taken together, the four ways of exercising authority must be part of a relationship of trust. Between 1966 and 2016, J. Vanier repeated it over and over again: “No authority without TRUST”.

J. Vanier recognises that it is “difficult to be a shepherd” and regularly denounces “bad shepherds”. The shepherd is “bad” if, on the one hand, he does not enter into the emotions and intimacy of the people under his responsibility, and on the other hand if he seeks order before divine intuition:

“The shepherd must not force this sheep to do something it is not ready for. He must listen to her. He must have great hope for her. He must stir up life in her. He must arouse expression in her. He must arouse freedom in her. It is a bad shepherd who keeps his sheep locked up, who does not communicate to them the freedom of the spirit. It is always embarrassing to be a shepherd with a number of sheep led by the Spirit because you don't really know in which direction things are going to move! You would so much like to have sheep that say: yes, yes, yes, yes... and that are all in line and that you can send out like little dogs, and that the order is perfect. [...] And it is dangerous for a shepherd who does not encourage expression, who is in his ivory tower and does not ask his sheep: do you suffer? Do you feel free from the freedom of God, from the freedom of God because the freedom of God is different from the freedom of the flesh... Do you feel good in your place, good in what you are? A shepherd who does not ask these questions, who is not constantly

listening to his flock, and who does not share with his flock, is a shepherd who risks being a tyrant [...] he is not the true shepherd. (doc_E)”

In contrast, the “good shepherd” is characterised by his commitment, his fidelity to his mission, and his preference for the most vulnerable and fragile in the community (doc_E). These different characteristics of the shepherd figure therefore have elements in common with the two previous authority figures: centrality of the personal relationship, trust, paternalism.

But the figure of the shepherd is above all part of a Christian paradigm and proposes a spiritual reading of the relationship of authority:

“This afternoon I would like to talk about one of the names of Jesus that are important, and to enter into the mystery of the Good Shepherd, to discover how He is the Shepherd and how I am the little sheep. But also how, following His example, I am called to be a shepherd. Jesus is both the Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd, the Innocent One who welcomes in his flesh the aggressiveness and hatred of the world.”

The shepherd exercises spiritual authority. He must be like Jesus¹. The progressive integration of material and organisational issues into Vanier's discourse on authority over the decades does not change this perspective. Forty years separate the above excerpt from the following one:

“Our role is to be the face of Jesus, to be the heart of Jesus, to be the compassion of Jesus. [...] From now on, it is you who are the temple of God. All this mystery that is you, that is me, that is us. From now on, we become the face of Jesus. When you have responsibilities, as many of you do, how can you be a shepherd who leads a flock, the economic problems, the material problems, the organisational problems, the conflictual problems that we all know... and how can you be the face of Jesus. All this is about bringing body and spirit, mind and heart, organisation and faith back into unity. It is a long road, I would say, of integration. And to lead the people who are yours, according to Jesus, the gaze of Jesus. (doc_AD)”

1. The developments intended to define the authority of the shepherd constantly refer to the example of Jesus and mobilise numerous biblical passages. Consequently, the training courses often take the form of a catechesis, to the point that the objective of J. Vanier's discourse often seems unclear: the listener as well as the reader no longer know whether it is a question of a training course in authority based on a catechetical foundation, or whether it is a catechesis which takes the theme of authority as a pretext.

In this perspective, authority and responsibility only have meaning before God and in relation to the economy of salvation:

“And when God gives us a responsibility for someone, we have to be caught up in this need to be concerned about everything that happens to someone who is related to me and to whom God has put bonds because I am his superior or his priest, or simply the friend of God in God. [...] One of the dangers of the pastor is not to realise that he is a pastor and not to feed the flock or not to realise how much in the designs of God he was a pastor and that he had to feed and that he has a grave responsibility because if he does not feed his flock... (doc_E)”.

The ability to exercise authority is “received”, it is a divine gift. According to J. Vanier, “humanly speaking, it is impossible to be good, committed and faithful shepherds” (doc_I), we must “especially ask the Holy Spirit to give us these gifts” (doc_AC). By implication, the source of good authority is divine. The role of shepherd is a quasi-total role; the perimeter of intervention of the shepherd in the life of those over whom he exercises his authority is very wide: interior and spiritual life of the person, but also personal and professional life choices.

Finally, the teaching of J. Vanier regularly raises an ambiguity:

“The shepherd is not necessarily the one in authority. There are hidden shepherds, little people who support little people (doc_I)”.

According to him, while all those exercising authority in L'Arche are called upon to draw inspiration from the figure of the shepherd as defined here, not all those exercising a shepherding role necessarily occupy a position of power in the organisation. In other words, shepherd authority and statutory authority are distinct. J. Vanier's discourse on authority seems at first sight to carry an inconsistency: authority is understood as a legitimate asymmetrical relationship in which shepherds have responsibility for the sheep. At the same time, shepherds can be everywhere, regardless of their status, since each one is called to be the shepherd of another. How then should the distinction between shepherds and sheep be positioned?

Moreover, Vanier's discourse sometimes goes so far as to reduce – or even cancel – the importance of any form of authority to a single, vague requirement of brotherly love:

“But in the end, there is no substitute for brothers and sisters loving one another. We may have a poor and imprecise constitution, an authority that is too tyrannical or too weak, and we may lack shepherds, but if we love each other, we will continue to live and progress.” (doc_I)

This contradiction underlines the core of J. Vanier's economy of authority: to discern, to relay the divine will and to live according to the rules of the Gospel. Legitimate power is spiritual. Its institutionalisation is of little importance. The exercise of responsibility according to the hierarchical chain of governance of the communities is secondary, without it ever being explicitly stated whether or not the governance of the communities should be subject to the holders of spiritual authority, the “shepherds”.

The figure of the shepherd also presents a second ambiguity which is introduced by the following passage from a 1970 retreat:

“Each of us is a pastor. It is important to discover how I should be a pastor, how I should feed those who depend on me, whether they are my children, whether they are those for whom I am responsible because I am a nurse or because I am a teacher or because I am a superior, or because...or whether they are simply friends whom God has united to me and who ask that I feed them. This is important, because the Church will grow, the assembly of the faithful will grow to the extent and only to the extent that there are good pastors. (doc_E)”

According to J. Vanier, the shepherd in L'Arche, as a spiritual authority, has a responsibility for the growth of the Catholic Church. At the same time, the founder never mentions the possibility of recourse to institutional validations of the shepherd's role, whether from the institution of L'Arche or from religious institutions. The ambivalence is striking: while the founder frequently uses Catholic references and language, and while he inscribes his words in a traditional Catholic religious imaginary in which members of L'Arche recognise themselves, he is silent about the traditional legitimising figures of the Catholic religious institution. For example, there is never any question in his discourse of submitting a call, an intuition, a decision or a mandate to a priest, leader or religious dignitary who is a member of a religious institution.

AN EQUIVOCAL DISCOURSE ON CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY

These observations raise ambiguities that directly echo the analyses of the previous chapters. We now explore them in order to shed light, on the one hand, on the ordinary exercise of command and responsibility in L'Arche (Chapter 11), and on the other hand, on the abusive configurations in which members of L'Arche are caught (Part 4).

A discourse on 'good' authority?

The legitimacy of power comes from the personal moral and spiritual qualities of the leader, as well as from the belief in his divine source. According to J. Vanier, in L'Arche, the leader is a leader by divine will and because of his personal qualities: he "sees clearly, he is competent, he plans well". He exercises "JUSTICE", "GOODNESS", with "TRUTH" and "STRENGTH". Legitimate authority is manifested by its singular relational effects: it "attracts", it is "respected", it is "trusted" (docs_J_K_AC_E_I). The relationship of authority unfolds exclusively in strong interpersonal relationships involving the exposure of the intimate, through the sharing of emotions, intuitions and personal suffering. The ultimate goal of the exercise of good authority is the conversion of the parties involved in the authority relationship. The spiritual reading of legitimate authority is not a rejection of professional experience or competence, but rather the manifestation of a theocratic paradigm (i.e. a worldview and relationship to the social world built on and according to a principle of the primacy of divine authority). While this is not unusual in a Western Catholic setting¹, Vanier's approach to authority stands out by the use of a double vocabulary of psychologising and spiritualising, but also by a strong normativity. Good and bad forms of authority are opposed according to a very stable dichotomous perspective throughout the five decades:

1. The literature has shown how, in the Western Catholic context, all human authority has long been considered to be of divine essence. Guy Lobrichon, *op.cit.*, p.68-70.

Illegitimate authority relationship (tyrannical)	Legitimate authority relationship (good)
Fear	Trust
Law	Dialogue
Imposition	Listening
Closed	Welcoming
Feeling of superiority	Humility
Centralisation	Delegation
Domination	Sacrifice/service
Blind execution	Inspired assistants
Commanding	Calling forth
Eliminating suffering in the other	Empathy for the suffering in the other

Validation and limitation of power

Without ever being precise or practical, Vanier's discourse on authority nevertheless establishes principles for validating and limiting legitimate power. The discourse is based on a theocratic reading of social relations: the principles that prevail in the mode of governance in L'Arche are spiritual and, consequently, the holder of legitimate power in L'Arche has received it from God: basically, it is God who leads the organisation. This representation of authority organises a hierarchy of legitimate power based on the relationship to the divine. Authority is a matter of divine election.

The reasoning is circular: the mandate of authority is given by God (through personal inspiration and/or prayer) or by men. The latter developed the mandates of the leaders (see chapter 11) with the help of prayer, through attention to divine signs and in the conviction that L'Arche, as an organisation, is a divine work through which God works. Therefore, by 'calling' or 'challenging' a member to exercise a mandate, these people become intermediaries of the divine will. The mandate of authority is thus given and received from God. This way of relating to the world invites the members of L'Arche to welcome and consider their leaders as appointed by God and to adopt an attitude of listening and trusting obedience.

The question of limiting the power of the leader, as we have seen, depends on the leader: that is, not only on his or her willingness to take into account the criticisms, opinions and ideas of those around him or her, but also on his or her ability to listen to his or her “little inner voice”. To validate as well as to limit the power of the shepherd, the tools available to members are personal psychological dispositions (trust in oneself and in others, caring for the suffering of oneself and of others, listening to oneself and to others) and spiritual tools and dispositions (prayer, paying attention to the signs of the divine, paying attention to having those signs confirmed by a partner). We stress once again that these dispositions and tools are individual or inter-individual (dialogue with a responsible peer).

Finally, J. Vanier's discourse on authority is marked by the complete absence of any reference to existing institutional forms of authority (state, judicial, ecclesiastical, medical administration), their tools, or their regulations. This observation raises questions, insofar as, as explained in Chapter 10, J. Vanier paid particular attention in practice to partnerships with public actors and to forms of institutional recognition¹.

An ambivalent relationship with order and tradition

If we take a step back from the three figures of authority summoned by J. Vanier (the educator, the father, the shepherd), we can see that the discourse is permeated by an ambiguous relationship to the traditional legitimisation of the authority relationship and to social asymmetries. The themes of order and elites, present in his speeches over the years, bear witness to this.

J. Vanier regularly states that “every community needs a government” (doc_I). He warns against “chaos” (doc_A): “It is obvious that order must be established” (doc_AD). To maintain it, he regularly stresses the importance of hierarchical forms of government and the presence of a leader:

1. More generally, there is a complete absence of references to the spatio-temporal frameworks of both the speaker and the listeners. If the documents did not give the dates, places and languages of J. Vanier's interventions, it would be impossible for the scientist to know to whom the trainings were addressed. This tends to give the impression of an out-of-this-world, out-of-time authority figure.

“In every parish you have a priest and you have advisors. In every organisation, you have the leader and you have the few around who also have positions of responsibility. [...] A superior of a house makes a house (doc_E)”.

There is evidence of a nostalgic discourse on order and traditional forms of authority. J. Vanier frequently speaks of a “lack of authority” in society. He denounces the “DISMISSAL of the Father”, is alarmed by its deleterious consequences which would be “DELINQUENCY, ALCOHOLISM, DEPRESSION, Psychological FRAGILITY”, and defends its importance so that each person can “grow” and “find [his] identity” (doc_V).

However, his discourse on authority presents at the same time several arguments that seem at first sight to be inconsistent with this positioning. Firstly, there is an absence of recourse to the lexical fields of coercion, constraint, and even more so of punishment. This absence appears to be deliberate, since these lexical fields are associated by him with ‘bad’ authority (see table above). We also note the absence of practical or operational statements about maintaining or restoring order: whether it is a question of the educator, the father or, a fortiori, the shepherd, J. Vanier's discourse never deals with how to take, assume or evaluate a decision, or how to settle a conflict or render justice, and even less so with how to coerce (or punish) the person who has endangered the orderly functioning of the community.

J. Vanier regularly formulates critical discourses concerning the legitimacy of the authority conferred by seniority, custom and tradition. He expresses his distrust of the processes of crystallisation of ways of thinking and doing, of the implicit or explicit injunction to reproduce them, and of the authority conferred by seniority. The following excerpt gives the reason for this:

“The younger sheep must be listened to carefully because they have a lot to say. If they have entered the flock there is a reason. It is because they have met the good shepherd. [...] And in a religious order, you have to be vigilant in listening to the younger ones, because the Spirit is often there. This does not mean that they should disorganise the house! But to listen to how the Spirit works in young people, and to marvel at what God is doing in their hearts. This is very important! There's one thing God must be displeased with...when the old sheep, the old sheep...when they look at the

little one that comes skipping and galloping over the hills and the...they look at it the wrong way and say: she's an emotional one...it will pass in time! When she understands what it is...No! The old fat sheep must be delighted with the little dancing sheep! (doc_E)”

It is not so much a question of favouring novelty or innovation on principle, but rather of defending the existence of a framework that is permeable to the deployment of behaviours that the founder values as a priority: enthusiasm, emotions and spiritual intuitions.

J. Vanier's discourse on obedience sheds light on the ambiguity of the relationship with traditional forms of authority. According to him, any relationship of authority requires:

“[...] qualities of obedience and respect for authority and prayer for authority. [...] Those who are not properly in charge must learn to be neither pure executors, nor emotional dependents, nor cranky; but true free men and women, who recognise authority, who dialogue with it, who love it and who recognise that having authority is not easy. But who also know how to speak openly, who are not afraid to ask questions, and this not in a spirit of vindication but of light, to help those in authority not to close themselves off in their function but to be people who live in the light. If authority sometimes becomes bad authority, it is often because those who do not have authority have not dared to say what they think. They have kept a scared and timid attitude of false obedience. They have refused their responsibility to be free and loving people. (doc_I)”

It is interesting to note in this extract that the responsibility for 'tyrannical' authority is placed on the shoulders of those members over whom the leader has authority.

The relationship of legitimate authority in which J. Vanier trains the members of L'Arche is based on their submission (loving, trusting and informed). The reference to the “love” of authority is interesting: while maintaining strong links with the dynamics of traditional authority as defined by Max Weber, it is fully in line with a charismatic authority relationship (primacy of emotion, feelings; affective and personal relationship with the person in charge and not with an institution or its legal-rational framework). Thus, the nuances brought by J. Vanier concerning traditional forms of authority can be understood as a sign, not of their rejection, but of their being overrun by charisma.

A government of elected representatives without elitism?

Referring to the example of Martin Luther King, J. Vanier denounces the temptation of elitism for leaders exercising power over others:

“On the one hand, elitism, “we are the best”, and contempt for others; I would say, it goes hand in hand, elitism and contempt, “we are the best, and the others...(doc_AD)”.

While affirming the importance of taking account of skills and knowledge, particularly professional knowledge, he affirms his distrust of those in the know (which echoes other analyses in this report). He extends this denunciation to the Catholic Church:

“In the Church there is this temptation of elitism ‘I know, you don't’. The contempt for the other... (doc_AD).”

During authority training, he warns the then current leaders of the danger of developing a feeling of superiority towards those who do not possess the same capital (social and symbolic capital only, in his speech).

But this apparent concern with elitism is ambiguous. Firstly, it is not based on any analysis of the social asymmetries that run through the L'Arche communities – and even more so the societies in which they are rooted. J. Vanier's discourse on authority is marked by the absence of any consideration of the social, economic and symbolic differences between people. It is not accompanied by any theoretical or practical reflection on the participation or representation of the members of L'Arche, in their diversity.

Then, faced with the risk of the contemptuous leader, J. Vanier encourages him to make a personal effort of conversion, by inviting him to “become aware of his vulnerability¹ “ following the example of Christ:

“This awareness of our vulnerability is an awareness of the vulnerability of God. He is much smaller than we believe, much more vulnerable. (doc_AD).”

1. The concept of vulnerability, which is polysemic and transdisciplinary, is massively used in the field of disability from the 2000s onwards, which may explain its appearance in J. Vanier's speeches around 2010. Hélène THOMAS, 2010, p.43 ; Axelle Brodiez-Dolino, “ Le concept de vulnérabilité “, *La vie des idées*, 2016 [https://lavie-desidees.fr/Le-concept-de-vulnerabilite.html]

Thus, in order to avoid an attitude of contempt, which he sees as a personal feeling, J. Vanier focuses exclusively on the perspective of inner transformation, self-improvement and personal sanctification of the leader. In his discourse, contempt is never considered as a structural phenomenon, which would be the result of the incorporation or institutionalisation of social, economic, cultural or symbolic inequalities between people.

The founder's words reveal a lack of understanding of the effects of social humility, as when he denounces "the false security of human incompetence", or the hesitation, fear or refusal of certain people called upon to take responsibility (doc_I). The blindness to inequalities of all kinds (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) is also visible in the call for the use of 'enlightened obedience'. The latter presupposes that people are capable of analysing and putting into words the reasons for their disagreements, of formulating proposals, of mastering the codes of language and non-verbal communication that are essential to debate, and that they feel it is legitimate to take part in the debate as well as in the decision-making mechanisms. In general, Vanier's discourse on authority never mentions either an awareness of inequalities within communities, or – a fortiori – an interest in reducing them. According to a well-known pattern widely analysed by the social sciences, everything happens as if the invisibilization of social asymmetries and the appeal to universal brotherhood (here, in God) make them disappear.

Consequently, while denouncing elitism and its associated forms of contempt, Vanier's discourse takes the form of an invitation to a form of government by the best, an aristocracy of potential saints.

THE IMITATION OF J. VANIER

Basically, J. Vanier's discourse on authority seems to describe the path and options that he himself has chosen. He trains leaders in charismatic authority, to follow and mirror him, inviting them to become shepherds of the members for whom they are responsible in L'Arche.

Becoming a "shepherd" at the J. Vanier school

Accounts describe – sometimes humorously – behaviours of leaders who seemed to have imitated those of J. Vanier, such as when they

turned out to be "charismatic" or "did not respect the rules"¹. Above all, many accounts testify to this apprenticeship with J. Vanier in the role of spiritual leader of the community:

"For example, he was always calling me to this role of prayer in the community. It's a good reminder, in fact, that some of the things he said to me, I took as gospel words. Well, if that's the person he sees in me, then I must be like that. And I remember when I was in [community], he said this extraordinary thing to me: "you have to be responsible for the presence of Jesus in the community".

Q: What did it mean?

A: I have to pray and just sort of bring what I get in prayer into the community and maybe remind people of Jesus and help them organise liturgies and so on. But I mean, it's a difficult task, isn't it? I mean, it's daring²"

In 1990, A. Saint-Macary was reappointed for a new term as director of the Trosly community, following a process of discernment. On this occasion, he sent a letter to each of the 300 members of the community:

"I have come to say a big thank you to you [...] I feel that everyone is deeply united in this process of freeing up new spaces in me to be a 'shepherd' [...] Everyone is called to grow where they feel most vulnerable. This is what I am experiencing for myself at the moment, being called to be more of a shepherd. [...] I am discovering that being called precisely where I feel most incapable, most helpless, where the deepest desire of my heart is to be found, gives me an experience of profound joy. I would like you to be able to experience this too, by discovering your point of conversion and by allowing yourself to be challenged on this point³."

The letter is informal, addressing each person personally. It develops a humble discourse in which the director insists on his vulnerabilities ("incapable", "helpless"). He "personally" invites each member of the community to follow his example. His first gesture, as a "shepherd", is to call for conversion. By its tone and vocabulary, this letter gives the impression of reproducing the tone and vocabulary of J. Vanier – and of

1. Interview 66

2. Interview 92

3. Letter from Alain Saint-Macary to members of the community, 7 December 1990, Trosly. AAT

T. Philippe. In any case, it bears witness to the reproduction of the model of authority learned from J. Vanier. Although the title “shepherd” is no longer in use since the mid-2000s, it seems, to designate the community director, it is still used to name leaders of fraternities or prayer groups in L'Arche communities.

Control, competition: harmful fruits

In reviewing her practice, a former community leader acknowledges having reproduced the example of J. Vanier (“I watched very carefully how he operated”). She observes perverse effects, in terms of centralisation of decision-making and “micro-management”:

“In retrospect, I did not give the person I delegated the power to change the direction. When I observed that the direction was going to change, I caught up with her and said ‘we need to talk about this again’. And actually, more in retrospect: I think what I was asking this person to do was to create the concrete plan of what I wanted, I wasn't delegating an initiative that they could have changed...But when I reflect, I think that's what I got from Jean as well. [...] He was the founder, he was there [...] and I actually emulated him in his leadership¹.”

The imitation of J. Vanier sometimes seems to have been openly assumed by some community leaders towards their assistants. One leader explained that she had experienced a relationship of “control” and “dependence” when she was an assistant in a community in North America, with her leader to whom she was “very close” and with whom she had a “very strong” bond. This community director was not only her referent and guide in all aspects of her life (spiritual, professional, personal -family, emotional-, psychological), but he took it upon himself to model his leadership behaviour on that of J. Vanier:

“I arrived in this community where the director was someone who considered himself a spiritual son of J. Vanier. [...] It's silly, but there's a certain emotion that comes over me when I talk about it, because with this director... [silence] Yes, J. Vanier is a bit of a model. [...] the director considered himself to be a bit of an heir to J. Vanier, or Jean was a bit of a mentor, his spiritual father in inverted commas. He talked about Jean, we had photos of J. Vanier. [...]

1. Interview 99

Q: When you say that he considered himself a spiritual son of J. Vanier, how did this manifest itself in concrete terms?

A: He said, for example, that he listened to Jean's tapes because he really wanted to [hesitation] integrate Jean's speech a little bit, his way of speaking a little bit, his charisma¹...”

While the director provided her with, in her words, “support” and “comfort”, she recognised that the relationship had become “too close physically” and “very ambiguous”. In pain, considering that it “was not very healthy” and “could not continue”, she opened up to J. Vanier about the difficult situation she was in. He was attentive and supportive. The long road to liberation and reassurance for the young woman was supported by another L'Arche community.

More generally, the diffusion and promotion of this form of charismatic authority in L'Arche, by encouraging the birth of new charismatic authority figures, has sometimes led to forms of competition between the “shepherds”, particularly at the time of changes in community leadership (provoking internal conflicts and crises of governance). Indeed, the end of a mandate does not mean the end of the authority-obedience relationship between the leader and the members, since authority is *personal*. Similarly, the appointment of a new leader does not imply the automatic attribution of charismatic legitimacy. However, it seems that the method of selecting and appointing leaders (the process of ‘discernment’) has contributed to charismatic legitimacy (Chapter 11).

Was J. Vanier challenged in this area in L'Arche by one of his disciples? Our investigation forces us to give a nuanced answer. In the spaces and instances where J. Vanier was present (Trosly, international coordination, etc.), it does not seem that he had to defend his authority as a “shepherd”, which was recognised by all. The forms of institutionalisation of the founder's authority (Chapter 11) certainly contributed to this. On the other hand, in communities and bodies where he was less present, other figures were more significant for the members of L'Arche. This is the case, for example, of the Daybreak community, which was permanently marked not only by charismatic community leaders, but also and above all by Henri Nouwen, a world-famous Catholic priest and best-selling

1. Anonymous

author of dozens of books on spirituality, who chose to live in the Daybreak community for several years, until his death in 1996.

As we said in the introduction to this section, the training of leaders did not affect all those we interviewed in the same way. However, in their diversity, and to varying degrees, the relationships of authority in L'Arche are historically marked by this asymmetrical charismatic framing which authorises, under certain conditions, relationships of control¹.

Moving away from obedience to the charismatic leader?

Jean was a master for me, but that's all, I was able to tell him that he was messing up, that I didn't agree with him, that there...well. But that never prevented me from speaking freely with him².

Our analysis would not be complete if we did not take into account the tensions between J. Vanier and the members in charge at L'Arche, concerning these asymmetrical charismatic authority relationships, of which we have outlined the main reasons. Personal relationships with the founder and guide are neither static nor linear in time. The unanimous speeches of admiration, recognition and trust towards J. Vanier did not prevent the majority of the members in charge that we met from pointing out the limits of the relationship that unites them to the great

1. As we have already said, the reception of J. Vanier's discourse on authority seems to be all the more important if the leaders have developed, at the same time, a personal relationship with him according to the modalities that we described in the first part. On the other hand, recent or current community leaders, but also leaders who have exercised their responsibilities in less ancient, less known and less attractive L'Arche communities (alongside, as it were, the ordinary circuits of visits and the organisation of events with and around J. Vanier) confirmed that they had never attended a training course on authority given by J. Vanier. Similarly, as we said earlier, among these more recent leaders or those from secondary communities, several had never had an accompanying relationship with him and/or had only met him late in their journey in L'Arche. However, all of them have – at the very least – become aware of the founder's discourse on authority through one or other of his writings (which all – with one exception – have read). All of them have also experienced this approach to authority at one stage or another of their journey in L'Arche: either through ordinary socialisation to the workings of the institution and the mechanisms for regulating power in L'Arche (chapter 11), or through a relationship with a leader who has reproduced this form of relationship of domination.

2. Interview 57

man. The accounts are often nuanced: in retrospect, several denounce an atmosphere in which “many people sought to be close to J. Vanier”¹, seemed eager to obtain his approval or even to “receive his anointing” and seemed to show a “lack of freedom”².

The sociological analysis of the relationship of authority that unites J. Vanier with the members in charge at L'Arche now requires a report on oppositions, compromises, moments of distancing, and even ruptures. Obedience and consent are to be qualified. Based on a case study, this third part of the chapter gives an account of the way in which leaders caught up in the relationships of authority that we have described³ were able to emancipate themselves.

ALICE IN MU

How can we build the right distance with the master and prophet? Can we say no to him without fearing a rupture? How do you negotiate with the heroization of your own life? Can one become a good *leader* in L'Arche without imitating the founder?

The beginnings of a blind and enthusiastic trust

Born into a large North American Catholic family that she describes as politically conservative and patriarchal, Alice studied philosophy and theology at university. Wishing to experience “something different”, she went to Mu to volunteer with an association run by a priest committed to non-violence and inter-religious dialogue. During this year of voluntary work, she met by chance J. Vanier who was preaching a retreat. Not knowing anything about him, she did not go to listen to his preaching. A few months later, while staying with a religious community, she discovered his book *Community and Growth*. The book “touched her deeply”. Back in her native country, while studying at a Catholic university, she learned from a Catholic newspaper that J. Vanier was coming to her own university to preach a *Faith and Sharing* retreat and decided to attend.

1. For example interview 55

2. Interview 57

3. In this third section of the chapter, words in inverted commas and indented paragraphs are quotes from interviews conducted and transcribed by the L'Arche study commission.

"It was a retreat with disabled people. I had spent time with disabled people before, but not much. And so I went on this retreat. I was completely blown away because it was...what I thought was: this is the Kingdom! You know, this is the Kingdom of God on Earth. [...] I was so moved by this retreat... and we, so, we were listening to Jean, and then there were small groups with people with and without disabilities, sharing groups. And [hesitation] it was just very, very powerful for me."

She was very interested in the L'Arche project and found out about it. She started a conversation with the retreat organiser to find out if L'Arche existed in Mu. The organiser replied:

"You need to talk to Jean about it, you know, he'd love to talk to you [...] I've got the sign-up sheet here..." And she looked at it. I said, "You sign people up for 4 minute appointments with Jean?" "Yes, yes". I said, "I'm sorry, but I'm not going to meet someone for four minutes. This is ridiculous. What's this about?" And so I didn't. But the retreat went on and I was very emotional at the end of the retreat. As often happened, people were queuing up just to say thank you to Jean... I was in the queue, I went up to him and asked, "Is there L'Arche in Mu?" He said – I was very moved at the time – he said, "Well, I can't believe you're asking! For two years now, someone has been preparing to open a community, but we are looking for a woman to accompany him, someone who knows the language and a bit of the culture. I said, "I'm supposed to go back in a month to work in a school, but I don't know, maybe it's for me, L'Arche?" He said, "Look, why don't we take this month to really discern and pray about it? And on your way back to Mu, stop in Trosly and we'll talk about it."

We find in this story the markers of many of the trajectories we have reported on: J. Vanier's word (read and heard) provokes intense emotion and plays a decisive role in a conversion journey (in the sociological sense); enthusiasm for J. Vanier's word and for the L'Arche project are closely intertwined; systematic redirection, by the members of L'Arche, to J. Vanier, prophet, man-sense and decision-maker; a call by J. Vanier (which finds an echo here) to come and work in L'Arche. Above all, as a result of this retreat, she considers J. Vanier to be "a man of God":

"I've even said it to him over the years: "When you talk, you talk about Jesus as your best friend. It's like faith is real to you. It's not just something that's in a book. It's not just a pipe dream. No! [hesitation] it's a tangible relationship that is [silence] shown and experienced through relationships

with other people. But clearly the foundation is the relationship with God. And so [hesitation] for me it was clear. There was no doubt in my mind."

As proposed by J. Vanier, she went to Trosly for a week before leaving for Mu:

"So I arrive in Trosly, I meet Jean and he says, 'It's great that you're here now. What we can do is get together tomorrow and decide when we're going to open the home, etc.'" So I thought, "Ah, is this discernment in L'Arche? I expected there to be some discussion about this, but no, no. For him, it was clear. But for me too it was clear, you know, I was ready to do it..."

The atmosphere in Trosly, the welcome she receives and the support of the community members for this community foundation project play an important role in her confident response:

"I was so well received. But it was also because Jean had – I'm sure – said in advance: 'There's this amazing person coming, etc.'. Trosly, for me it was [silence] a bit strange, but [silence] also sacred: people were really praying, they were really living with people with disabilities. They were joyful. They seemed normal, you know, not crazy. And so I thought, 'wow [silence] Yes, this is God calling me to [hesitation] this'."

From enthusiasm to collapse. Shattered confidence, isolation

Everything happened very quickly. Only two months after Alice's return to Mu, the first person with a disability was welcomed. The following month, the person who had been preparing the opening of the community for several years left the project. Alice found herself alone at the helm, with no experience of what a L'Arche community was like. Enthusiasm was suddenly extinguished.

"Jean and Odile came and Jean said to me, "You know, we're going to have to close the community unless you stay... but we'll send someone to be with you, if you agree to stay. So I said, "I'll say yes, but you have to send someone who knows L'Arche. I don't know L'Arche at all! They said, "No, we can't do that. You are the one who knows the language and the culture. But we will send someone to support you. You have to be responsible for this community. They added: "You must know that you are free. But if you say no, we will close the community. OK! So here I am, I'm about 25 years old... I was very stressed, I really felt that it wasn't my

responsibility... but well, that's what they were asking... and everything was mixed up because I didn't want the community to close, we had just said "yes" to a person with disabilities! So of course I said "yes I'll stay"..."

In addition, they firmly ask her to keep a secret about an event related to the emerging community and explain to her the lie that she must now tell, to avoid "scandal". This lie jeopardises the local partnerships of the emerging community and puts it in an untenable situation:

"Jean had told me that I had to lie, I had to lie... I don't know what it was about me that made me disagree, but at the same time agreeing to do [hesitation] what he said I should do. It made my life hell."

J. Vanier and O. Ceyrac comforted her by telling her that they would visit her every three months.

"Before they come the second time, Jean writes to me [laughs] and says, 'We're coming to visit you in a fortnight, I can't wait to see you, I can't wait to confirm you for a five-year term' [laughs] Well, I burst into tears. And I was alone. There was literally nobody there. Nobody. I just thought, what the hell is he talking about, five years? I can't do this for five years!"

When they come, Alice manages to negotiate a shorter commitment period and sets several conditions. The following years were extremely trying for her. The assistants came and went without any of them having the cultural knowledge or practical skills necessary for community life. Alice had no salary, no contract, no real contact person. Her contacts with L'Arche International were limited to the occasional receipt of a cheque with a note from the international coordinator.

In this context, with difficulty, she tries to negotiate the right distance with J. Vanier. On several occasions, the latter insists that Alice correspond with him, to "share everything" with him. Faced with her resistance, J. Vanier and O. Ceyrac went so far as to bring her a typewriter "because he really wanted me to write to him. But I never did". According to Alice, the source of her reluctance came from the disillusionment of the first months:

"From the beginning, J. Vanier was not a saint for me [...] clearly, he was a human being. [...] I think something had broken and...you know, I respected him. But I certainly didn't want [hesitation] to have him as a companion or spiritual director! [...] When I went to Trosly, of course we met. But

it wasn't really an accompaniment. But he once said to me, "Have you ever thought about the call to celibacy?" And even though, of course, I had thought about it a lot, and I had even thought that maybe it was my path, but inwardly I said to myself 'you have no right to ask me that!' [...] why was he doing that? He wasn't my spiritual director or anything..."

In addition, Alice feels that she does not find any support from the members of L'Arche in Trosly, where she has been to on visits several times over the years, as she is bound to secrecy (of which they are not aware):

"Every time I went there, even though I was going through hell in Mu... I would walk down the street in Trosly and people would say to me 'Oh Alice! We pray for you every day! Oh my God, it's wonderful what you're doing. And I wanted to kill them, because they had no idea what I was going through! And Jean and Odile were telling stories about this 'heavenly' community [silence] and I was there, dying."

After three years, a replacement was sent one month before Alice's final departure, without having any of the skills that Alice had presented to J. Vanier as being essential for the continuity of the community. At the end of her mission, her physical, mental and spiritual exhaustion was complete. Her loyalty and obedience to J. Vanier, as well as her isolation, placed her in an extremely difficult professional and personal situation, bordering on danger. When she left, the relationship of trust was broken.

Personal, professional and vocational (re)construction

Not feeling able to share all that she had just experienced with her family, and not yet having recovered, Alice chose to live for some time in France, at a prudent distance from the Trosly community. While searching for her way, she gradually rebuilt her link with J. Vanier and L'Arche:

"Jean was extremely loyal to me. Every time he came, he phoned in advance and said, 'I'm coming. Do you have time for a coffee? And so we saw each other from time to time. Gradually I became aware that although my experience was unhappy, in terrible circumstances, there was something in L'Arche that was for me. L'Arche is something important."

After considering several options, she chose to join a community in Canada, as a "simple assistant", which, according to her, allowed her to

live the L'Arche adventure in a language, a culture and a spirituality that were closer to her own and of which she mastered the codes:

“One thing that is very important is that this is all happening in North America. This Kingdom is lived in North America. That really touched me, because those are my roots. Then the spiritual side [...] I really felt... and that was because of Henri [Nouwen], God bless him, just the way he was... I felt really connected to the way L'Arche was lived. [...] And the people were sincere. The friendships were [hesitation] I would say easier. And I made strong friendships.

Alice lived for several years in this community in Canada, taking on intermediate responsibilities while attending training courses. During the 1990s, she was contacted in good and bad weather by the successive leaders of the geographical area of the Mu community when the latter was in serious difficulties. These calls are a painful experience for Alice for several reasons. Firstly, because they are each time disconnected from her own trajectory and personal concerns; secondly, because they are made without consultation with the other international leaders (for example, a call to return to lead the community is sent to her the day after she has given her official answer, after discernment, to another call that had been sent to her to assume another responsibility in L'Arche). Finally, because each time they revive her complex and painful bond of attachment to this community:

“The Ark wants me to be the saviour, which is so unhealthy.”

A fresh start. Repair, caution and a collective scheme

Finally, faced with the request to return to Mu for a year, she agreed to go there for several weeks to see if it would be possible for her – after an absence of several years. She visited all the local partners, in particular the religious communities, the medical and social institutions and the families of the people welcomed by the L'Arche community. This visit overwhelmed her.

“It was amazing, it was like my family, you know, like going back to my family [...] it was so wonderful for me to see them again and be welcomed, because L'Arche, L'Arche had betrayed them... And they treated me like I was their closest sister who had never left...it was really beautiful.”

Without telling anyone, Alice also decides to apologise to everyone, on behalf of herself and L'Arche, for the lies, the secrets and the breakdown in trust:

“It took a lot, a lot of energy, but it was the right thing to do. I felt responsible, you know...And I knew it wasn't going to come from anywhere else in L'Arche. Jean wasn't going to apologise, the zone coordinators weren't going to apologise...”

Strengthened by this doubly restorative experience, Alice began to take seriously the proposal that had been made to her and decided to invest herself fully in studying the conditions for the possibility of reopening the community. A tug of war then began between her and the regional manager, in which O. Ceyrac took part, under the eye of J. Vanier who remained discreet:

“Before we all met again, I said to him in private: George, I'm leaving for a year to see if it would be possible to reopen the community, if I see any sign [...] otherwise I have to say no. He agreed. Then we met again in Trosly, with Jean and Odile, and Odile said to me, “Oh, Alice, it's wonderful that you are opening the community again! “I looked at George – Jean was there – and I said, “No. I've made it clear to George. I'm not going to open it. I'm going to see if it's *possible*. If the community is going to re-open in the future, it will be someone from Mu, not with an outsider like me.” “But no, no, no, Alice, that's for you to do. I know that's what Jesus wants, etc.”. Honestly, I mean, I got the whole thing! So I made it clear: “Under these conditions, I can't do it. [...] I'm going back to Canada tomorrow if I'm asked to go and reopen the community, because I won't do it.”

Alice's firmness paid off: it was confirmed that she was going to Mu to study the *possibility of re-opening the* community. Alice then firmly negotiated her living conditions there, her autonomy but also the purpose of her mission. In her words, she refuses to be “just another foreigner paid by someone from outside”. She did everything she could to integrate herself into the local life and culture, and set herself the following goal: to see if any of the inhabitants would be interested in founding a L'Arche community.

In many ways, this sequence before Alice's second departure to Mu is profoundly different from the first. For Alice, the decision is cautious, collective and despiritualized (but not without faith and prayer).

This time, in order to make her decision, she benefits from a plurality of interlocutors who know her personally, professionally or spiritually. Since her experience of L'Arche in Canada, Alice has benefited from the spiritual guidance of a Jesuit priest. She also benefits from the advice of a community director in Canada, several elders whose wisdom and experience she admires and respects, and her friends. Thus, a small team intended to support and accompany Alice from a distance, in her mission to evaluate the conditions for the reopening of the community, was set up. This support was given in a practical way with monthly telephone meetings and regular letter exchanges. J. Vanier is not part of it and is only a secondary interlocutor to whom she does not feel accountable.

During this second sequence in Mu, Alice was able to oppose, negotiate, set and enforce conditions, take on conflict and divergence, but also take on her own responsibility. Alice's career in L'Arche has continued to this day.

Clear friendship in mission

The violence of disillusionment, opposition, but also misunderstandings (others will take place over the following years that are not described in this account) did not end up in a definitive break between Alice and J. Vanier. On the contrary, she explains that she gradually built up a relationship with him that she describes as a bond of friendship. She feels able not only to share and freely assume her own options and opinions, but also to recognise what she owes him, particularly from a spiritual point of view:

“Over the years [silence. Hesitation] I really liked Jean. And I [hesitation] made it a point to spend time with him. I didn't write, he wrote sometimes, but just a little something.... But every time I went to Trosly I would see him once or twice. [...] because I thought: he won't always be there, so why not go and have a meal with him? [I really enjoyed it. [...] I felt real affection for him. I mean, asking me to lie and all that, it was really hard. But still, you know... I have to say that a great part of the reason I'm where I am in my faith life is because of the retreats and the conversations with him.”

Alice adds:

“But given my experience of what I thought was a genuine friendship with Jean, I was taken completely by surprise by what we learned in the 2020 enquiry report. I feel a deep sense of personal betrayal. More deeply, I feel a horror and disgust at knowing that he used his power to abuse – sexually, spiritually, emotionally – people who trusted him.”

FROM BEING UNDER HOLD TO UNDOING THE HOLD

The case we have just presented is far from isolated. The story featured dimensions that we found in similar stories from women and men, who pointed to a “dark side” in their relationship with J. Vanier:

I dare to use the word “hold”. I have freed myself from these controls, but for me Jean was in a strong place. In the beginning, I was too dependent, certainly, on Jean's vision. I trusted his vision much more than my own. And L'Arche followed Jean a lot, all our assistants. We had a relationship with each other that mirrored the one Jean had with us. We [hesitation] spoke and wrote to each other, reproducing those relationships, very spiritual, very affective, without it being at all sexual. It was very affective: dear little brothers, dear little sisters in Jesus. There was a kind of culture that was in L'Arche².

Alice's story gives an account of these “durable asymmetries of grip”³, of this web woven by multiple and almost invisible threads, which quietly ensnared her. The grip can be defined as a form of “soft domination”⁴, a takeover of the experiences of the social world by another actor. Alice's trajectory shows how, gradually and quietly, all the dimensions of her existence (spiritual, intellectual, emotional, professional) were controlled by others. In the interviews, several people stressed their difficulties in assuming a personal desire, in feeling legitimate to discuss the intuitions or ideas of J. Vanier.

The relationship of control is an experience of violence that is difficult to observe and to grasp, both for the victim and for the observer⁵.

1. Anonymous

2. Anonymous

3. Francis Chateauraynaud, “L'emprise comme expérience”, *SociologieS* [En ligne], online 23 February 2015, accessed 05 November 2022. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/4931>

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

Indeed, it does not necessarily use ritualised forms of power, or even ordinary techniques of manipulation. It operates “by small touches”, “discreetly”, and is based on the presence of deeper processes, several facets of which have been explored in this chapter: collective fascination with the prophetic figure and charismatic authority, the interweaving of the spheres of intimacy, private life and professional life, omnipresent spiritualisation, the personalisation of power, isolation, etc. The relationship of control is also based on “a logic of networks [...] giving the impression that obligations are in reality not very binding – and at the very least negotiable”¹.

Following a mode of relationship imitated from that of J. Vanier or learned in L'Arche, many become in turn prophets who are listened to and admired, and from whom others seek advice, wisdom, intuition, accompaniment. Their arrival is celebrated during their visits to old communities or during federation events.

The denunciation and dismantling of a relationship of control is difficult and painful because it involves the link to the group and the network, and can lead to isolation or exclusion. Thus, many interviews with leaders in L'Arche have testified to the violent and destructive effects of these relationships, reporting experiences of “exhaustion”, “burn-out” or “personal crises”, which lead them to leave their community, but also to begin an indispensable process of emancipation. Professional, spiritual, or personal, emancipation also sometimes involves the disappointment of the master, and the risk of a break with him.

Like in Alice's story, interviewees reported on ‘a process of disengagement’, i.e. the manner, conditions and means by which members have emerged from this relationship or have succeeded in transforming it, mainly by restoring a distance between the dominant actor and themselves. The tools of emancipation are named: institutions capable of contesting or challenging the decision or position of the charismatic leader, diversity of interlocutors, spiritual guidance outside L'Arche. Although not all the stories collected in the interviews have the same

1. *Ibid.*

positive outcome as Alice's¹, many of the people interviewed have taken care to confirm their loyalty to the organisation and its founder, rejoicing that they have managed to “distance themselves”, without “ever having had a break in the relationship with Jean”.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined in detail the mechanisms of legitimisation of authority of J. Vanier in L'Arche. They form a framework through which situations of power abuse and control can unfold. J. Vanier is a charismatic leader whose authority is based on an emotional community that shares with him – or believes it shares with him – a strong emotional bond and a sometimes blind-trust, in the absence of any control or criticism. Considered a prophet, a personal guide, a clairvoyant founder, an exceptional man, he can exercise his authority in all spheres: personal, spiritual and professional lives, without having to resort to coercion. Throughout his prophetic career, J. Vanier took care to legitimise his form of authority and to train those in charge in L'Arche.

The statements of the leaders of L'Arche show the existence of a form of equivalence and close interweaving between three objects of belief: J. Vanier (charismatic authority figure); God (Jesus, friend of the poor and fragile); and L'Arche (organisation pursuing a legitimate mission). The accounts and descriptions studied in this chapter show the coherence of this tripod, from which it then seems difficult to extract oneself: the relationship to each leg gives meaning to the relationship with each of the other two. Moreover, when the codes and reference points of belief in God explicitly borrow from those of the Catholic Church, this triangular relationship marks the relationship of the believing member to the latter.

Is it possible to break with one of the three feet without breaking with the others? Many of the people we spoke to testified to this difficult questioning. Have the ingredients for the development of controlling relationships outlined in this chapter disappeared in L'Arche? Two years of investigation in L'Arche call for vigilance.

1. One of the effects of our interview campaign is to over-represent cases of trajectories that did not end with a complete break with the founder and the institution. Other people have cut ties, interrupted all relationships and disappeared from the L'Arche networks. Although it was difficult to meet them, the fourth part of the report presents some cases.

PART 4

Abuses at the heart of L'Arche

Translation : *Rebecca Ireland and Anthony Gething*

Introduction

Claire Vincent-Mory

The fourth part of the report deals directly with the cases of control¹, assault and sexual abuse in L'Arche that were brought to the attention of the Commission. What happened? What are we talking about? What strategies can we identify?

Abuse, system: A note on vocabulary?

It seems essential to say a few words about the way in which the Commission's social sciences study has considered the abusive dimension of the situations which were brought to its attention. Considering the regular reporting of abuse in the public arena and in the media, one could prefer avoiding the term "abuse". However, we find its usage of relevance here, provided that we first clarify our definition and approach. Generally speaking, we define sexual abuse as an unjust use of power of a sexual nature which causes harm to the person who is subjected to it².

In line with the precautions outlined by the authors of the CIASE report [*Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic*

1. Translation of the French word *emprise*, which has no exact translation in English and could also be translated, depending on the circumstances, by other terms such as "hold", "grip", or even "influence" or "power". For a presentation of how we approach and define the phenomenon of *emprise*, please refer to Chapter 12 last sub-section.

2. The legal treatment of sexual abuse is different depending on countries. Under the French Criminal Law, for instance, sexual abuse is not a criminal charge (unlike in the USA for instance – see 18 U.S. Code § 2242). The term "abuse" is rather associated with taking advantage of a person's vulnerability for personal benefit (abuse of trust, abuse of weakness, etc.). Other penal charges – later mentioned in this report – exist and are close to the US or Canadian Criminal Codes, although not exactly similar.

Church], we are aware of the risks associated with the use of the expression 'sexual abuse'. Firstly, it could imply the existence of an authorisation threshold for sexual behaviour (i.e. behaviour would be "tolerable up to a certain "limit"¹). On this point, we should not lose sight of the fact that sexual abuse is actually part of a double continuum: a continuum of violence (between sexual offences and other forms of violence²); but also a continuum of power relations in which sexually abusive acts are interwoven (whether in the material, spiritual, professional fields, etc.). Secondly, the term 'abuse' is polysemous. By convention, it is often used to designate 'maltreatment'. Under these conditions, can the term be legitimately used by the Commission to describe acts to which certain people seem to have adhered, assuming their transgressive nature, but also in the eyes of whom such behaviour may have taken on the appearance of tenderness, affection or even love? Based on the work of Ben Mathews and Delphine Collin Vezina, the authors of the ICASE report use the following three criteria to identify acts of abuse from a social science viewpoint:

§0126 – a power relationship: there must be proximity or dependence between the victim and the aggressor, whether this relationship is familial (parent), institutional (teacher, cleric) or economic (employer). This power relationship may be superimposed on others, such as age (adult vs. child), gender (male vs. female), etc.;

§0127 – an exploitation of a situation of dependence of one person on another: the abuser uses his superior position for his own benefit and to the detriment of the abused person;

§0128 – a lack of valid consent, resulting from the asymmetry of the relationship³.

1. *Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church, France 1950-2020*. Report of the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church, October 2021, p.81-83.

2. The literature is abundant on this. See for example: Véronique Le Goaziou, "Les violences sexuelles : point de vue sociologique", in Bruno Gravier (ed.), *Penser les agressions sexuelles. Actualité des modèles, actualité des pratiques*. Toulouse, Érès, 2016, pp. 15-34; Liz Kelly, 'Le continuum de la violence sexuelle', *Cahiers du Genre*, vol. 1, n°66, 2019 (1989), p. 17-36.

3. *Sexual violence in the Church...* op. cit. p.83.

We subscribe to this view, assuming that we focus our attention primarily on the configurations of power that made them possible.

This usefully introduces a difficult question asked to the Study Commission in its terms of reference: was sexual abuse in L'Arche – and the configurations of control that made it possible – 'systemic'? For the Commission, questioning the systemic dimension first means trying to identify repeated characteristic elements common to different situations involving abuse. Secondly, we attempt to understand the reasons why abusive relationships involving sexual assault were able to multiply, to be sustained over time and evade criminal sanction. Finally, answering this question implies holding together several levels of analysis, considering at the same time the level of the relationship between the individual protagonists, that of the organisations and institutions within which acts of abuse were made possible, and, more broadly, that of the societies of which they are part¹. There is a clear link between social frameworks (political, legal, religious, family, cultural) and the facts that were confided to the Commission². In this fourth part, our analysis focuses on examining the relations between the individual perpetrators of abuse and the people who see themselves as victims or survivors, while showing the connections with the scale of organisations. This is particularly visible in Chapter 13, which deals with the place of 'La Ferme' in Trosly, and Chapter 18, which traces routes to escape from situations of hold and abuse.

As a multicentric organisation and a federation of partially autonomous communities, at points in its history L'Arche International has been traversed by configurations of control. These have led to situations involving abuse of power and sexual abuse which may have been systemic. The situations identified took place for the most part in the community of Trosly-Breuil, on which our analysis focuses. So far, the report has highlighted that the 'sectarian core' around J. Vanier, T. Philippe, while rapidly becoming a minority in L'Arche, became inserted in networks (family, religious, etc.) with similar abusive configurations. Those we report on take shape in their connections with places outside Trosly-Breuil

1. On this point see Louise Fines, *Les systèmes d'abus au pouvoir: Les abuseurs veulent maintenir l'ordre des choses*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2019.

2. The literature is abundant. Due to space constraints, we will simply refer to the bibliographic sources cited throughout the report.

and outside L'Arche (the Saint-Jean family, the Dominican Order, the Carmelites studied in chapter 8, certain Foyers de charité).¹ From this point of view, while the fourth part of the report takes the form of a case study within L'Arche, involving J. Vanier, his master T. Philippe as well as other disciples such as G. Adam, it aims to provide elements which could support comparative work – in subsequent studies – by identifying the singularities of situations of control and abuse in L'Arche, but also their continuities and common aspects with others.

Methods and cases considered

A historical and sociological analysis, such as the one we develop in this section, runs the risk of appearing cold, crude or devoid of empathy. Our intention is to present painful situations in a rigorous way, by proposing some keys to understanding, enabling the reader to navigate what may appear, at first glance, to be a sea of confusion. Indeed, the cases entrusted to the Commission are heterogeneous in terms of the nature of the acts, the geographical locations, and the way in which they are described and presented by the people affected. While some people present themselves as 'victims' or 'survivors' of an abusive relationship, some presented themselves rather as consenting partners in a transgressive relationship.

The ambition is not to offer a representative analysis of all forms of sexual abuse justified by mystico-sexual beliefs inherited from T. Philippe. Rather, on the basis of several dozen cases of abusive relationships involving three abusers, for which we have solid material, we expose the main mechanisms and patterns of control by which women and – more rarely – men² were caught in the web woven by a master and

1. With regard to J. Vanier, it should be noted that although Trosly-Breuil, his place of residence, appears to be the epicenter of the abusive relationships he established, many of the events recorded occurred during his travels around the world. The same applies to T. Philippe, although his movements were much more limited.

2. To date, the commission has been informed of 3 cases of men (for the L'Arche sphere). One is J. Vanier. The second seems to consider himself a "person initiated" in the mystico-sexual practices of T. Philippe and seems to have adhered to them, as we show in this fourth part of the report (G. Adam). A third man, Joseph [name withheld], claims to have been sexually assaulted by a woman close to T. Philippe, in a pattern of assault similar to all those described in this fourth part.

his most faithful disciples. Parallels and transformations in methods of seduction and in the arguments employed to convince and subdue the other are highlighted. Finally, we present the way in which people trapped in such situations give an account of their process of breaking free. In so doing, our approach is to be respectful to the subjective experiences of the people caught up in these relationship configurations involving accompaniment, affectivity, prayer, intimate gestures, sexual acts (whether denounced as aggression and abuse, or considered to be liberating and fruitful), i.e. to give an account of the way in which they describe and understand what has been experienced.

Before setting out situations of a sensitive nature, we present the approach of the investigation and analysis. Numerous sources were used: accounts gathered during the interview phase, personal documents entrusted to the Commission (diaries, correspondence), archival documents (in particular those of ADPF, AGOP and ACDF). We used qualitative methods such as case studies and discourse analysis, which are particularly well-suited to the study of abusive phenomena that took place in a long-standing organisation with a worldwide presence and whose archival records are extremely patchy depending on the location and the period. By building relationships of trust with the individuals, by conducting interviews tailored to each person's preferences, but also by cross-referencing the various materials, the survey sought to capture all the nuances of the situations of control and abuse that were entrusted to us. This methodological choice prompts us to restate a self-evident observation: the L'Arche Study Commission is not in a position to give a precise estimate of the number of people who have been caught up in an abusive configuration involving a sexual act or a non-consensual intimate gesture¹.

1. This methodological choice was also based on the conditions of the survey: it was impossible (for the group of researchers involved) to carry out a census—even partial—of all the cases of sexual abuse for an international and multilingual organisation born 60 years ago, in respect of which the quantity of archives is not only colossal, but also scattered throughout the world. It was therefore not possible to work out statistical estimates. The context of COVID greatly complicated the task (border closures, travel constraints, closure of archive locations, etc.). The choice was therefore made to concentrate efforts on acquiring a thorough understanding of the historical and sociological construction of situations of sexual abuse and control.

That being said, the investigation conducted by the Commission has made it possible to gather a solid material in terms of quantity and relevance, relating to several dozen cases¹ which must now introduce. In the course of its enquiry, the Commission learned of 25 women who, at some point in their relationship with J. Vanier, experienced an accompanying situation involving a sexual act or an intimate gesture (kissing on the mouth, caresses to the body). Chronologically, these relationships span a period from 1952 to 2019. They therefore include situations dating back to L'Eau Vive, some of which we have seen continued in L'Arche. Some of the women are now deceased. Of the 25 women, 14 were or are still members of L'Arche. Some had made their careers in L'Arche. Others, fewer in number, without having been members of L'Arche, are close to a community. We were able to interview 8 of the 25 women². Depending on their preferences, these interviews took the form of semi-structured or biographical interviews, involving one or more members of the Commission. In only one case, the interview was conducted in writing by exchanging open-ended questions and written answers in a manner that preserved anonymity. Five women declined our invitation. Based on our current knowledge, and the methodological choices outlined above, it is strongly assumed that this number of 25 is lower than the actual number of women involved. Moreover, this number does not take account of the correspondents identified in Chapter 6 for whom the Commission received no additional data (“Léa”, “Alex”, etc.).

1. How did we identify these women and men? Some contacted us directly, others were brought to our attention by a third party, or by reading explicit documents obtained from archives, or by cross-checking interviews with people we met during the enquiry. A contact address was set up on the L'Arche Internationale website, which allowed people to contact the Commission directly. Our work also benefited from the results of previous enquiries conducted since 2014 into the sexual abuse attributed to T. Philippe, J. Vanier, G. Adam: testimony collected by L'Arche Internationale since 2014 and by GCPS in 2019 (whose report had mentioned 6 adult women abused by J. Vanier). Neither GCPS nor L'Arche officials gave us any names, information or documents without the prior consent of the people concerned. Several gave it. Refusals to communicate with us, as well as refusals to send us previous testimonies, were scrupulously respected by all parties.

2. Interviews 2, 45, 51, 52, 77, 90, 92, 111.

While the Commission's mandate led it to focus on J. Vanier, the investigation identified 23 people who had been sexually abused by T. Philippe. This figure is far from exhaustive, since the decision was made to consider only some of the situations following the foundation of L'Arche, which could provide significant material for identifying the structures of the abuse system. The second part of the report recalled that for the period of L'Eau Vive, the Holy Office investigation concluded that 33 people were involved. A small number of these are among the 23 people the Commission was able to identify. Of these, the fourth part of the report analyses in particular the cases of 14 people who were or still are members of L'Arche at the time of the enquiry. Of these 14 people, 5 women agreed to hold one or more interviews with members of the Commission.¹ We had a written discussion with one woman.² In addition, the investigations that preceded ours gave us access to a significant amount of relevant additional material (including written testimonies and hearing reports). As in the case of J. Vanier, without being able to produce a precise estimate on numbers, our in-depth knowledge of the historical and sociological survey material allows us to construct the hypothesis that the numbers we quote are clearly below the number of people sexually abused by T. Philippe.

Beyond that, the investigation led the commission to identify other situations of sexual assault or abuse that would fall under the mystico-sexual beliefs learned from T. Philippe, and which would involve other members of L'Arche. It would appear that at least three of T. Philippe's disciples did, in turn, sexually abuse, assault or “initiate” others, using the mystico-sexual beliefs learned from him. J. Vanier was one of them. Secondly, the Commission took an in-depth look at two cases of women who said they had suffered an abusive relationship with G. Adam, a priest at L'Arche de Trosly-Breuil for several decades. One of them has reported the abuse she says she suffered to the ecclesiastical authorities. These two cases have been taken into account in our analysis. Finally, the Commission was informed of a situation similar to that experienced by J. Vanier with Jacqueline d'Halluin in 1952: a man,

1. Interviews 8, 11, 90, 104, 117.

2. Donna Maronde Varnau.

Joseph [name withheld] was initiated into mystical-sexual practices that he considered abusive by a woman close to T. Philippe¹.

In this fourth part of the report, we will successively examine each stage of the abusive relationships involving J. Vanier, T. Philippe, those attributed to G. Adam, but also at times also to Marie-Dominique Philippe. Chapter 13 retraces the history and functioning of the La Ferme home, which appears to be an epicentre of abuse at Trosly-Breuil. Underlining the commonalities and differences between the abusive settings, Chapter 14 looks at the moment of seduction, giving some significant markers of the profile of the people who enter into these abusive relationships, and the forms of control that sustain them. Chapter 15 describes behaviours and acts with a possible non-consensual sexual dimension. Chapter 16 presents the arguments deployed by J. Vanier, T. Philippe and G. Adam to convince the people who were seduced. Then, chapter 17 takes the point of view of these people, to understand why they did not explicitly reject the mystico-sexual reasoning. Finally, chapter 18 gives an account of the various ways in which women and men caught up in these abusive relationships managed to escape them, and how the institutions of L'Arche entered into a process of collective disengagement.

1. When contacted, this woman did not wish to meet the Commission for an interview.

CHAPTER 13. Allowing the forbidden: “La Ferme” at L'Arche

Claire Vincent-Mory and Antoine Mourges

To begin this fourth part of the report, we will introduce the space of “La Ferme”. La Ferme is the visible place where Thomas Philippe, and later his successor Gilbert Adam, carried out his ministry. It is a singular and autonomous home within the community. For several decades, it has been the place where several groups presented in the report intersected: former members of Eau-Vive, “initiates”, and various members of the L'Arche communities. The enquiry revealed that this was a preferred space for the development of situations of control, abuse—particularly sexual—but also for the initiation of disciples. Could La Ferme have been a “new Eau-Vive” under T. Philippe, permitting that which is forbidden?

This chapter presents the main elements of the history of this place, focusing on the period during which T. Philippe was central to it. It aims to offer a better understanding of the framework and conditions in which acts of control and abuse could take place and be repeated, while remaining barely visible. The institutionalisation of La Ferme is carefully analysed, looking at several dimensions. We report on the visible concealment of the 1956 conviction, and the initiative to rehabilitate the ministry of T. Philippe and his reputation as a saint, but also on the forms of protection and damage control. This chapter is structured chronologically in three successive periods (1964-1972; 1972-1991; since 1991).

1964-1972. Rebuilding a visible and legitimate ministry for T. Philippe

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF T. PHILIPPE IN THE EMERGING COMMUNITY LIFE

As a “hidden” chaplain at Val Fleuri from the end of 1963, T. Philippe was at the heart of the community dynamic that was unfolding at Trosly. He celebrated mass every morning in a room in a building belonging to Miss Marie-Madeleine Gsell. Transformed into a chapel, this room adjoined a “storeroom” where T. Philippe lived. The majority of assistants attended Mass there every day, so much so that the chapel was full and they were “squeezed in”. From 1965, Eucharistic adoration and the weekly rosary with commentary by T. Philippe were introduced. T. Philippe hosted assistants and people in the village, for sessions of accompaniment and the administration of the sacraments¹.

As Chapter 11 has demonstrated, from the outset T. Philippe actively participated in the construction of the community dynamic: he drafted the first “provisional statutes” of the Trosly community in 1967, led and contributed to meetings of committed members at Ourscamp, but also to the meetings of the Council of the work, of which he was a member by right. In this capacity, he participated in approving admissions and dismissals, in all decisions submitted to the Council and was a privileged contact for the permanent members exercising the first duties in the community. He took a position on many subjects debated during the first years, such as the appropriateness of opening a home for women, the balance between religious practice and working time, the compatibility between the development of a Christian community and a Centre d'Aide par le Travail (CAT) [*A supported workplace for people with disabilities*], etc.

T. Philippe's multifaceted authority in the community is supported by the legitimising and deferential discourse employed by Jean Vanier. For example, in the report on the first years of L'Arche written by J. Vanier in 1970, he cites the “interior and exterior signs” underpinning

1. Antoinette Maurice, *Cette richesse qui vient du pauvre*, op. Cit., 2007, p.32-33 ; Gilbert Adam, “ Mon histoire ”, personal blog [Online] URL: <http://www.pere-gilbert-adam.org/d-C-est-divinement-grace-a-Jesus-que-pu-realiser-la.html>.

his personal conviction that “Providence is not only watching over us but is giving us [...] direction”. The first two signs highlight the central role of T. Philippe: “The circumstances surrounding the founding of L'Arche in 1964, the presence of Father Thomas in Trosly since 63”¹.

T. Philippe regularly met people with disabilities, and many testimonies stress his ability to comfort and soothe.

INSTITUTIONAL DISCRETION

From the point of view of SIPSA, which was the legal interface of the movement, the presence of Father Thomas and the importance of religious activities were almost invisible until the mid-1970s. The documents (annual policy reports, etc.) do not mention this part of the nascent community activities, despite its significance. For example, the annual pilgrimages to Rome, Fatima or La Salette are presented as “summer trips” (to Portugal, to the Alps), without any reference to their spiritual dimension.

T. Philippe's name never appears in the institutional documents. However, the reports are precise and describe over several dozen pages the activities, issues and challenges of the dynamic of L'Arche. For example, the teams are presented in detail: including tall numbers and roles and mentioning many names. The 1968 policy report includes, for the first time, a brief mention of a “chaplain². Moreover, we note that while J. Vanier quickly co-opted close and trusted members to SIPSA, among them “les tout-petits” [*little ones*] (J. d'Halluin, G. McDonald, J. Riandey, etc.-see chapter 11), he seems to have kept T. Philippe away, the latter never becoming a member of SIPSA. This discretion cannot be attributed simply to his status as a cleric in a lay association: Father André Stoecklin, who was superior of the Abbey of Ourscamp, for example, was a member of the SIPSA Board of Directors at that time.

Another example of this desire to remain in the background of official structures can be found in the letters that T. Philippe addressed to

1. Jean Vanier, 1970 Report, AAT.

2. *Ibid*

his Dominican superiors and to the Holy Office from 1964 onwards¹. This correspondence implicitly reveals the fear of T. Philippe and the elders of L'Eau Vive that their regrouping in Trosly-Breuil would not be understood by the authorities in Rome and could lead to new measures being taken against them. As Chapters 7 and 9 have already shown, this fear is visible in the language of dissimulation that T. Philippe employs when writing to his hierarchy.

As the sanction against T. Philippe had not been lifted, the main purpose of these letters was to ask for his rehabilitation. For T. Philippe, regaining the power to freely hear confession from women and men was crucial, as not having this power drew attention to him. This power was granted to him temporarily in respect of men until 1970, then for women and men for increasingly longer periods (one year in 1970, 3 years in 1971, 5 years from 1974). In his requests, T. Philippe employs a particular description of his life in Trosly-Breuil. He invariably presents himself as a penitent, acknowledging his past misdeeds, asking forgiveness for the harm he has caused to his superiors (his victims are not mentioned), insisting on the length of his penance and the suffering it entails. Thus in March 1964:

“The Holy Spirit himself wants to come and console me by drawing me even more into this life of solitude, which I can easily lead here. You understand that the deep wounds of these last years, which remain so sensitive, can only be soothed by God alone, and by the poor unfortunate people, whom I can better understand and help thanks to these sufferings (mine) that I still experience².”

The arguments employed would be repeated tirelessly in the following years. Note the repeated presentation of his life as a “life of solitude”. In December 1964 he evoked “this life of solitude and humble service of mercy to these poor”³. A year later he “thanked Jesus and his Holy Mother for being able to lead an increasingly solitary and secluded

1. They are kept in the T. Philippe file (III M 815) at the ADPF. It contains more than 250 documents, grouped into six sub-folders, each covering a decade. For the most part, it consists of correspondence between T. Philippe, the successive priors of the Province of France, the General Curia, the Holy Office and the successive bishops of Beauvais.

2. Letter from T. Philippe to Fr. Kopf, 2 March 1964, III M 815, ADPF.

3. Letter from T. Philippe to Fr. Kopf, 29 December 1964, III M 815, ADPF.

life here with this simple ministry of mercy to these poor¹. In 1967, when the provincial had changed², and again in 1969, the rhetoric remained the same:

“I always thank God and my religious superiors deeply for having allowed me to lead this life of solitude in Trosly and to have this humble apostolate with the poor. The Holy Spirit draws me more and more to this hidden life which suits the older Fathers so well³.”

The use of the theme of solitude became a little less frequent after 1970 and when L'Arche began to become known. There is some evidence of the theme during his first months at Trosly-Breuil. However, after the foundation of L'Arche, it no longer corresponds to reality, since along with J. Vanier, T. Philippe is the initiator of a rapidly-growing community (Chapter 10).

A final point is particularly striking when reading his letters: until 1979, T. Philippe makes no mention of L'Arche, either of its foundation or of J. Vanier's presence in Trosly. The first properly explicit mention comes from the written testimony provided by Jean Vanier in 1979 to support a new request for rehabilitation of T. Philippe. According to the content of these letters, until the second half of the 1970s, T. Philippe was the very solitary chaplain of Val Fleuri in Trosly-Breuil.

The founding of “La Ferme”

However, during those years, the dynamic in Trosly was quite different. From the very beginning, the ambitious project for a “Medical Centre” in Trosly-Breuil envisaged the construction of a dedicated place for the priest's ministry (see Chapter 10). Given the central place of T. Philippe, it can be said that this intention is linked to his presence in the dynamic.

The constant growth in members of the community in Trosly-Breuil and the authority of T. Philippe (statutory – he is a “priest of the Catholic Church”, spiritual, moral, community) quickly led to him being given a dedicated place, which was more spacious and more ambitious than the room-chapel at the Place des Fêtes. In September 1972, SIPSA acquired

1. Letter from T. Philippe to Fr. Kopf, 25 December 1965, III M 815, ADPF.

2. Letter from T. Philippe to P. Rettenbach, 27 December 1967, III M 815, ADPF.

3. *Ibid.*

a “stone barn with a garden located at La Ferme¹ in Trosly-Breuil”² for this purpose.

According to documents from this period³, the place is presented as a “complex⁴” where staff can rest and for the receiving of visitors :

“We were able to transform an old farmhouse in Trosly into a chapel, library and bedroom – a place of rest, silence and prayer that we had felt had been needed for a long time. La Ferme serves as accommodation for staff and visitors. [...]The number of people who come to visit us is continuing to grow. The development of LA FERME allows us to significantly increase our capacity to accommodate people and to give those who wish to do so the opportunity to meet us more profound level⁵. ”

The design and layout of the oratory and the chapel, intended to hold 300 people, were directed by J. d'Halluin. A one-room flat (both bedroom and office) was set up for T. Philippe. The adjoining room was used as a waiting room for people wishing to meet him.

Beyond its institutional presentation, “La Ferme” was perceived within the community as one of the homes of the community, original due to its particular vocation: it is a “spiritual place of welcome and retreat for psychologically fragile people”⁶. Organised around the person of T. Philippe and his priesthood, this home was placed under the responsibility of J. d'Halluin. As a unique home, La Ferme, with its chapel, was also the place of the community's religious life. It was dedicated on the occasion of the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi). This feast became the anniversary celebration of La Ferme and there is evidence that it was celebrated by the Trosly community until the beginning of the 1990s. While this is an important feast in the Catholic calendar, we note that it is also an important anniversary date for J. Vanier and J. d'Halluin. Vanier and J. d'Halluin: it is “their feast day”, the day of initiation of the former by the latter (Chapter 2).

1. “La Ferme” means “The Farm” in English, precisely because of the initial purpose of the place.

2. Minutes of the SIPSA AGM of 6 November 1973, AAT.

3. *Ibid.*

4. SIPSA moral report, AGO 1973, p.11. AAT.

5. SIPSA moral report, AGO 1972, AAT.

6. A. Maurice, *op. cit.*p.88.

1972-1991 : The autonomous place of the “old shepherd” of L'Arche.

Until his departure in 1991 and his death in 1993, T. Philippe was the community's pastor. As described in Chapter 11, he was an ex officio member of the Community Council of the Trosly community and had formal authority in it, although his participation had decreased during the 1980s.

According to the members of the community, La Ferme has a double “vocation” which is not defined by any constitution or rules: acting as a guest house for visitors and members of L'Arche; “sharing the writings and the word of Father Thomas and Jean Vanier”². Administrators and leaders take in turns to reiterate that the activities of La Ferme are for all the L'Arche communities. Beyond that, the “vocation” of La Ferme is, according to T. Philippe, akin to a contemplative vocation centred on Eucharistic adoration. Its three “essential aims” are adoration, welcome and the diffusion of spirituality³. Religious activities are primary and central: almost permanent Eucharistic adoration (from 5am to about 11pm every day); 1 to 3 daily rosaries, mass every evening at 6pm during which T. Philippe spoke at length, and a lesson given by T. Philippe on Saturday mornings during the “Rencontres de La Ferme”.

AN AUTONOMOUS PLACE? THE COMMUNITY AND LA FERME, A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

The autonomy of La Ferme in relation to the L'Arche community in Trosly has been a subject of tension since its foundation. The question of its full integration or its wide autonomy was recurrently discussed.

On the institutional level, J. Vanier, supported by other members of the community council, wished La Ferme to have its own legal existence outside SIPSA. Various reasons would be raised: Collective memory, as reported by several former leaders of the Trosly community, conveys the idea that J. Vanier had become afraid when he saw the

1. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission meeting of 19 September 1977, p.2, AAI.

2. Minutes of the General Assembly of the Association “Les Chemins de L'Arche”, 28 June 1991, p.1, AAI.

3. T. Philippe, “The three essential aims of la Ferme”, La Ferme meeting of 13 September 1986.

growing political importance of the left in France. He feared that public subsidies to the community would be called into question if the socialist -perceived as anti-clerical – came to power. In addition, the community received donations, in particular T. Philippe for his religious “works”. He wanted to be able to dispose of them freely, independently of SIPSA. In any event, it was a question of legally separating the activities connected to the medico-social dimension from all others. For these reasons, the association “Les Chemins de L’Arche” was founded in April 1977. Pierre Leborgne was the president for 14 years. Alongside T. Philippe and J. d’Halluin, J. Vanier was an administrator of the association until it was integrated into L’Arche in France.

Over the years, the relationship between the administration of La Ferme and that of the community of Trosly has been debated.

“For the single management of Arche-La Ferme to be real and effective, structures must be invented and put in place. Otherwise, the paths of La Ferme and those of L’Arche risk, in the long run, becoming separated or colliding¹.”

The redrafting of the Community constitution in 1987 clarified this point and confirmed the independence of La Ferme. From a financial point of view, La Ferme was dependent on donations, in particular those of the Fondation des Amis de L’Arche, of which J. Vanier was president. It periodically launched appeals for donations which were generally successful thanks to the reputation and contacts of J. Vanier and T. Philippe². The dissemination activity (printing, bookshop and cassettes) was chronically in deficit, as was the hosting business, which “does not impose fees on those who come and [which] often accommodates people without much money”³.

1. Document “Reflections on our actual functioning in relation to the Constitution”, January 1984, p.1, IAA.

2. The appeal for donations launched at the end of 1989, for example, raised 163,000fr. Minutes of the General Assembly of the Association “Les Chemins de L’Arche”, 28 June 1991, p.1, AAI

3. Minutes of the General Assembly of the Association “Les Chemins de L’Arche”, 28 June 1991, p.1, AAI.

A DISORGANISED PLACE

It is ambiguous how individuals came to “belong” to La Ferme home. Although some people worked and lived there on a daily basis, many people, mostly women, who neither lived nor worked in the home, nor were involved in L’Arche, gravitated towards the community and T. Philippe. They came to have a meal from time to time and participated in religious activities (rosary, adoration, masses, teachings of T. Philippe). Among them, we find names we have already come across in the second part of the report, such as Marise Huebert, Anne de Rosanbo, Marguerite Tournoux, Lucie Denis (J. d’Halluin and Jeanne Riandey held positions of responsibility in the community until their retirement).

“I was used to a communal, religious life. This was not the case at all. I found that everyone did a bit what they wanted. It was [laughs] a bit anarchic. There was no structure at all, but there was a certain freedom, but [hesitation] a lot of control by Father Thomas. Right away I felt that, that there was a kind of... Everyone was “ah...Father Thomas, Father Thomas” [silence]”¹.

Devotion to the person of T. Philippe served as “social glue” in a heterogeneous group. Conflicts over access to T. Philippe were frequent. The group dynamic and modus operandi favoured social prestige and seemed to rely on the submissive attitude of all parties:

“There was a weekly meeting where we met to organise work. And I will always remember the first meeting I attended when I arrived (1977). Jacqueline had told us “Anne de Rosanbo is going to come this time because – there were elections coming up, I remember – she’s going to come and help us to see who we should vote for because well, most of us are a bit ignorant...”. That made me... I left! [laugh] I’m sorry, but at that time I couldn’t say what I thought because I was quite new. So I left the room. I didn’t come back².”

In 1984, J. d’Halluin decided to stand down as leader of the La Ferme home. The discernment committee, including T. Philippe, J. Vanier, J. d’Halluin, “called” Agnès Humeau to take over. She arrived at La Ferme in 1977 after trying her hand at religious life (notably at the

1. Interview 25.

2. Interview 25.

Carmel de la Fontaine Olive, founded by former Carmelites of the Carmel de Boulogne).

Agnès Humeau's mandate as leader of La Ferme, which was renewed several times until 1995, covered a triple role of "manager", "shepherd" and "prophet":

"In these three areas, you will be constantly concerned to seek the Will of God, to discern it in close and trusting union with the L'Arche priest. [...] Your task will be to maintain the home of La Ferme in connection with Father Thomas, the L'Arche priest mandated by the bishop and the leadership of L'Arche¹. "

According to Agnès Humeau, at that time there was no community life, no effective work organisation, and no constitution to formalise the principles and ambitions of the place. Similarly, although she was mandated to play the role of house leader, she acknowledges that "It was Jacqueline who took all the decisions. It was clear! It was Jacqueline". Jacqueline lived nearby and continued to be an important figure in the La Ferme group. During her successive mandates, she tried to rebalance this power relationship in her favour, relying in particular on Alain Saint Macary, the "shepherd" of the Trosly community, to whom she reported on the activities of La Ferme every month.

J. d'Halluin's authority stems from the fact that she played the dual role of spokesperson and guardian for T. Philippe, who had undisputed supreme authority over everyone at La Ferme:

"Father Thomas [hesitation] was in charge of everything, but we never saw him. We never saw him because first of all, yes, it was Jacqueline who protected him. Moreover, when I was appointed leader, I was told "Jacqueline looks after Father Thomas. You look after La Ferme". [...] It was a relief for me too because I didn't want to look after Father Thomas at all. But I obviously had many dealings with Father Thomas, in relation to what was happening at La Ferme, to the people he sent us²... "

1. "Communication to the General Assembly", Mandate entrusted to Agnès Humeau, document attached to the minutes of the General Assembly of the Association Les Chemins de L'Arche, held in Trosly on 27 June 1988. AAI.

2. Interview 25.

Within the home, T Philippe enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. He had a personal secretary (Dominique Montfort), and organised his own agenda based on religious activities and receiving people. He did not eat with the other members of the community: devoted women brought him his meals every day and washed his clothes, etc. Every year, accompanied by J. d'Halluin, he went on a three-week trip "to visit all the monasteries where he had sent young women"¹.

THE PASTORAL COMMISSION, AT THE SERVICE OF T. PHILIPPE'S MINISTRY

As an ex officio member of the Community Council, at the end of the 1970s, T. Philippe expressed a wish to no longer sit on the Council. His stated reasoning was contradictory:

"The more the Christian community grows, the more I feel that I have to be more hidden and that is why I no longer go to the Council, but on the other hand – while being more hidden – I feel that I must not be isolated and therefore remain very present²".

Indeed, after the first decade of L'Arche, he would only come occasionally, depending on the theme. Against this backdrop, a Pastoral Commission was set up in the community, in phases, from 1976³. It was conceived as the body dedicated to "spiritual power" in the community, intended to work in dialogue with the leadership of the L'Arche community in Trosly. Explicitly built around T. Philippe, it was first known as the "commission alongside the priest appointed to Trosly by the bishop to represent the Church of Jesus". The document specifying the purpose, role, functioning and composition of the Commission was drafted by T. Philippe and approved by the Community Council. This commission works on multiple issues: the recognition of the diversity of vocations (single or married couples), the relationship with the parish sector and the people "outside the home" who attend services, the "needs" in terms of spiritual life, etc. Above all, it focused on the organisation of the liturgical calendar and sacramental life. The commission was conceived to be the space

1. Interview 25.

2. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission meeting of 19 September 1977, p.2, AAI.

3. RC of the Electoral Body meeting of 22 May 1975, p.1, AAI.

where the authority of the L'Arche's pastor could legitimately be exercised and where his word and his decisions carried authority. In the mind of T. Philippe, he embodied the "spiritual power" of the Church facing the "temporal power", from civil society – without it being very clear what this second expression meant – probably "the leadership" of the community¹. How did the roles of leader-organiser of the community and T. Philippe's role as pastor intersect? It would appear that T. Philippe's ambitions conflicted to some extent with the authority of the community council². This point echoes the tensions between the authority of the community priest and the authority of the organiser-leader outlined in Chapter 11, but also the atmosphere of tension between T. Philippe as the priest and "spiritual authority" and J. Vanier as the "leader" and "shepherd" of the community until 1980, which was regularly reported by third parties.

The members of the commission are co-opted by the priest. As T. Philippe wrote, it was a question of surrounding himself with qualified people to advise and support him in his ministry. Analysis has revealed that he gathered around him several categories of members. Firstly, members of the community in positions of responsibility (such as A. Saint Macary, Claire de Miribel, Cecilia). He also invited "the people [designated] to help him [the priest] in the distribution of Holy Communion and who are as a result rather like deacons". This category referred to young men who had expressed a desire to prepare for the priesthood (Gilbert Adam, John Dare, Marc Prunier, Jean-Pierre Millard). Finally, a third category referred to people who were "particularly competent or especially interested in the liturgy". This category included women responsible for preparing places of prayer, sacristies and for the liturgy (Françoise Pasturaud, Jacqueline d'Halluin, Marie-Hélène Desjeux).

In general, we observe that T. Philippe presents himself as the representative of the Catholic Church and the higher religious and spiritual authority in L'Arche. He has no hesitations in comparing L'Arche with other new communities in order to defend the superiority of L'Arche

1. "Commission to the priest delegated to Trosly by the bishop to represent the Church of Jesus", May 1977, p.2. Handwritten document by Thomas Philippe, and typed version, both signed 'Father Thomas'. AAI

2. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission meeting, 2 October 1980; p.3, AAI.

from the point of view of vocations, as well as its capacity to give rise to religious vocations:

"I must confess that after [...] getting back in touch with the *Emmanuel*, which I have known for a long time, and with the *Chemin Neuf*, I see that all of them say that they have very close links with L'Arche but that we have our own vocation which they are very much in need of. [Many people have been educated here by the poor and the homes of L'Arche and would like to return to La Ferme to benefit from leadership [...]] Proportionally, there are more vocations here than at the *Lion of Judah*¹. Fr Marie-Dominique likes to say that L'Arche is like the marshalling yard of the Holy Spirit²."

A presbytery around the "saint"

T. Philippe therefore carried considerable legitimacy in the community. His birthday is celebrated every year at the Trosly community's end-of-year party³. He is venerated by many as a saint, and his founding "mystical experience" is known and celebrated: collective memory tells us that during the first pilgrimages to Rome, J. Vanier brought the group to pray in front of the fresco of *Mater Admirabilis*.

Such a reputation attracted people who were considering a religious vocation. In 1977, T. Philippe wanted to bring together, in his own words, "a small presbyterate at L'Arche"⁴, by bringing together young assistants preparing for the priesthood. At that time, four young men (whose names are given on the previous page) were preparing for ordination to the priesthood. Indeed, while the debate between a priest "of L'Arche" and a priest "for L'Arche" was launched, T. Philippe was in favour of the first option and affirmed that priests officiating in L'Arche communities should come from L'Arche:

1. *The Emmanuel community, The Chemin Neuf community and the Community of the Lion of Judah* are Catholic Charismatic religious communities part of the "new communities" movement of the 70s. The third one change its name in 1981 and is now known as *Community of the Beatitudes*).

2. T. Philippe, "The Three Essential Purposes of La Ferme", presented at La Ferme Meeting on 13 September 1986. AAT.

3. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission, 21 May 1981, p.1, AAI.

4. Term for the group of priests gathered around a bishop in a diocese.

“L’Arche has a spirituality that is very rich on the Christian level. [...] The more a L’Arche community grows in strength and depth, the more difficult it is for any priest to become a chaplain within it- this could lead to a great deal of tensions¹.”

On the basis of this argument, he asserts his own legitimacy to train and support the “priests of L’Arche” better than any other institution².

FATHER GILBERT ADAM

Due to the frequency with which G. Adam is mentioned in the following chapters, a few elements of his background should be provided. He was born on 16 July 1940, on the family farm at Basse-sur-le-Rupt, in the Vosges. According to his own autobiographical account kept in the archives of the Trosly-Breuil³ community, his childhood was poor and difficult, marked by poverty, violence and his father’s alcoholism. His father ran the family farm, while his mother worked in the village textile factory. G. Adam entered the world of work at the age of 14 as an apprentice butcher in Epinal. He obtained a vocational qualification in butchery and a job which he had until he was 18, then did his military service in the quartermaster’s office in Tübingen (Germany). For him, military service was a decisive opening for the rest of his life, allowing him not only to make up for his academic shortcomings, but also to begin an existential quest, which soon became spiritual. Having become a non-commissioned officer, he considered officer’s school and signed up for another three years. He was sent to Ouargla in Algeria where he joined the community of the White Fathers, with whom he “began a journey of conversion”. He read many spiritual works about the lives of saints and began a vocational discernment process. In Algiers, he met the Little Brothers of Jesus with whom he decided to try to lead a religious life.

He joined their postulancy in Montbard where, after 6 months:

1. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission meeting of 19 September 1977, p.2, AAI.

2. *Ibid.*

3. The whole trajectory as well as the quotations mentioned in this section of the chapter come from this autobiographical account: Gilbert Adam, autobiographical text, AAT.

“D. Voillaume suggested that I go off and study rather than continue with the Little Brothers. This was a painful departure for me, which I saw as a rejection of me by the Little Brothers. ”

He then turned to the White Fathers and entered their centre of formation for late-stage vocations in Bonnelles, near Paris. He became familiar with L’Arche through a talk that J. Vanier gave there. In 1965, he then came to stay in Trosly for the first time. However, he continued his journey with the White Fathers and began his theology in their seminary in Kerlois (Morbihan). At the beginning of 1966, the superior called him to advise him to “join the world”.

It was then that he decided to move to Trosly-Breuil, where he became an assistant at the L’Arche home, and subsequently house leader at the Val Fleuri and obtained a diploma in specialised education.

However, the desire for a priestly vocation did not abandon him. It was now under the direction of T. Philippe and with the advice of M.-D. Philippe that he discerns and forms himself:

“I spent my free time accompanying Fr. P. Marie-D. Philippe in conferences and courses in Paris. I could thus benefit from his teaching! Fr Thomas gave classes to the students of Ourscamp in the chapel and then at La Ferme on Saturdays, and I enjoyed them very much. There was a beautiful harmony between my work at L’Arche, community life and my studies. [...] I discovered that while the “intellectual” dimension was necessary, the affective sense was a very important place of self-knowledge. It related to the “consciousness of love” of which Fr Thomas spoke so much. Through this spiritual openness I ‘built’ myself from this interiority, from my relationship with Jesus and with others, by privileging the affective, interior dimension. ”

It was therefore at the school of the Philippe brothers that he pursued what he perceived as his “studies”, with a view to the priesthood. We can see that he absorbed the concept dear to T. Philippe of “consciousness of love” and, in a way, his anti-intellectualism. In order to obtain an official diploma, in 1974 he began a degree in theology at the Catholic Institute of Paris, in which he did not feel very comfortable:

“I felt in these studies that the teaching that was given there was very different from that of Fr Thomas and Marie-Do! I did not necessarily agree with certain ideas that came out of May ‘68! Fr. Thomas and Fr. Marie-Do helped

me to strike a balance. I just had to be careful not to show it too strongly! I chose the written word as a means of validation, so I could feel secure.”

If this attitude can be explained by the lively theological debates of the 1970s, it also echoes the culture of secrecy characteristic of the “initiates”, which G. Adam seems to have joined, at a time and in circumstances that escape us.

It was Bishop Desmazières who offered him the opportunity to become a priest. In the same movement that led him to support J. Vanier’s final request for ordination, the bishop presented several requests for ordination to Rome for members of the Trosly-Breuil community. During the *ad-limina* visit of January 1977, where he supported J. Vanier’s request to Paul VI, he presented these files to Mgr Garonne, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, Seminaries and Teaching Institutions. He asked for candidates to be ordained who had already completed all or part of their theological training, with a very short time in the seminary. Two files were validated: those of Marc Prunier and G. Adam. They were ordained on 8 September 1978 in Compiègne, after a year of light training at the seminary in Reims (one week of classes and one week of parish insertion per month). G. Adam then became T. Philippe’s second in command at L’Arche, while being appointed parish priest of Pierrefonds in 1980; he then replaced him as chaplain after his departure in 1991. He held these two positions for several decades, until in 2013, a woman claimed to have been abused by him¹.

A CLERICAL, AUTONOMOUS AND CONSERVATIVE CHURCH

Around T. Philippe, one can observe a traditional relationship with rituals and sacraments, both in the scrupulous following of the liturgical calendar and the celebration not only of solemnities and feasts but also of traditional rites such as the liturgy of Rogations, celebrated in Trosly

1. As we will see in Chapter 18, this was reported to the Beauvais prosecutor, who initiated a preliminary investigation for rape of a vulnerable person, resulting in a decision to close the case with no further action on 26 October 2015. As the facts were already old, the prosecutor considered that it was not possible to deny or confirm the existence of a sexual relationship and a possible state of coercion. During these proceedings G. Adam denied any sexual relationship and only admitted gestures of affection not of a sexual nature. Further information is provided in the following chapters.

on the three days preceding the Ascension, according to the traditional use prior to Vatican II.

T. Philippe, together with G. Adam from 1980 onwards, regularly insisted on participating in daily Mass as a priority, which should be considered “somewhat like the conventual Mass”, but also on the practice of adoration in the Great Chapel, presented as the high point of community life, on Fridays¹. They express their constant concern to evangelise and administer the sacraments and regularly remind us of their authority in this matter. T. Philippe makes “pastoral visits” to the homes each year, apparently during Lent². Similarly, the commission regularly recalled during the 1980s the need for priests T. Philippe and G. Adam to be informed of the religious profile of all the members of the Trosly community, including people with disabilities who were accommodated for a period of training, for example³. Religious life is almost independent of that of the local parish. For example, the sacraments of initiation (baptism, first communion, confirmation) are celebrated within the community, in the presence of the bishop in the case of the third.

The traditional relationship to rituals and sacraments is visible in the content of the exchanges within the Pastoral Commission. For example, the designation of those who can ‘give Holy Communion’⁴ is the object of particular attention and supports a form of clericalism, attributing a superior authority and a right of control to priests. At the Pastoral Commission of 27 September 1983, for example:

“Fr Thomas and Fr Gilbert remind us that they are the ONLY ones entitled to appoint one or more persons to give Communion during Mass (or in place of celebrations if there is no Mass) and to bring Communion to the sick⁵.” Furthermore, “It is important to give priority whenever possible to the community Mass celebrated by Father Thomas or Father Gilbert⁶.”

1. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission of 9 September 1982, p.3, AAI.

2. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission, 10 January 1983, p.1, AAI.

3. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission, 21 May 1982, p.1, AAI.

4. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission, 15 April 1983, p.2, AAI.

5. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission, 27 September 1983, p.2, AAI.

6. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission, 4 November 1982, p.2, AAI. Capitalisation and underlining f as per the text of the Minutes.

The authority of the priest is articulated here with a personalisation of the presbyteral authority.

The reminder of the authority and control of the priests of the community over religious affairs is almost systematic, whether it is a question of catechesis (“Father Gilbert [recalls] that he should be the ultimate point of reference for everything concerning catechesis”) or the appointment of persons authorised to take part in the service of the liturgy (“sacristy service”) or authorised to bring “Holy Communion to sick people”. The appointments are a “prerogative” of the priest and are recorded in the successive minutes. With the exception of Cecilia McPherson, only men are appointed to ‘give Holy Communion’¹, while the sacristy is run exclusively by women.² In addition to this gender distinction in the allocation of tasks, there is a second distinction: most of these women and men are celibate and have announced the Covenant. Many of them have responsibilities in L’Arche³. In all these respects, these personal appointments sanctioned by the priests contribute to shaping distinctions and hierarchies among the members of the community. As everyone conforms to this system, the power of the priests is reinforced through a ripple effect. These conservative markers which insist on distinctions in status, gender and the superiority of clerical authority provide a useful introduction to the stories of the people who were victims, which are presented in the following chapters.

CONCLUSION

Until his departure in 1991, T. Philippe remained the superior authority of La Ferme, even after G. Adam was ordained a priest and appointed by the bishop to accompany the community of Trosly (Chapter 11). The superior authority and autonomy of T. Philippe was not contested by anyone. The stories and archival documents suggest that J. Vanier, while respecting them, remains attentive to La Ferme. This attention can be

1. For 1983, for example, the authorised persons were Joseph Muzi, Jean Vanier, Marc Gilbert, Alain Saint Macary, Cécilia MacPherson. Minutes of the Pastoral Commission, 9 September 1982, p.3, AAI

2. For example, in 1982: Françoise Pasturaud, Martine Haeck, Patricia Wiglesworth, Marian Mc Hinney, Jacqueline Sacré. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

observed in his ongoing care to ensure that the autonomy of La Ferme was preserved (steps towards legal autonomy, questioning of the community council – Chapter 11), the foundation and administration of “Chemins de L’Arche”, as well as in his systematic participation in the selection of the person in charge of the La Ferme home. It also appears in the accounts of the members of La Ferme. Agnès Humeau, who was in charge at the time, recounts the following:

“One day, Jean Vanier came to me and said, ‘Listen, Father Thomas asked me to have a word with you. You have to send a certain man away [a man who had recently come to La Ferme at the request of T. Philippe] because [hesitation] it is dangerous. Father Thomas lied to you. He is someone who has already killed his wife and is ready to do it again, he is about to do it again¹.’”

In a number of cases, J. Vanier indeed acted as an intermediary between T. Philippe and other members of the community, demonstrating not only that a close relationship of trust was maintained between them, but also that J. Vanier remained informed about what was happening in the space of La Ferme.

1991-2019. A problematic legacy

ORPHANS AND SUCCESSORS

The sudden departure of T. Philippe in 1991 caused upheaval at La Ferme. Officially he left to join his brother M.-D. Philippe in Saint-Jodard, but in reality he travelled around Europe accompanied by a woman, before settling down there. He died in 1993: “the members of La Ferme were left orphaned and distraught”². They tried to find ways to keep T. Philippe present. In everyone’s minds, he was still the central figure and the reason La Ferme existed. G. Adam immediately assumed T. Philippe’s prerogatives:

1. Interview with Agnès Humeau

2. Véronika Ottrubay, Presentation of La Ferme to the Zone Assistants, 2010.

“Gilbert wanted to take his place in a rather authoritarian way. He wanted to replace Father Thomas, but he was not Father Thomas¹.”

In addition to the sacraments and the daily mass in the large chapel, he continued the “Meetings of la Ferme” which were led by T. Philippe on Saturday mornings. Based on listening to recordings of T. Philippe’s teachings, G. Adam developed a discourse intended to maintain a feeling of belonging to La Ferme around T. Philippe:

“We need the voice of Father Thomas more than ever to bring us together, and at the same time to confirm us, in our progress forwards.”

His vocabulary and his favourite themes are an extension of those of his master:

“So I think that these are the two graces that we are going to ask for each other during this whole month: It is that Mary, by making us adorers, teaches us a little more how to enter into her hidden life, and it is when we do not have the felt grace of adoration, but we feel very strongly all the temptations, and we feel very strongly all the attacks of the devil, and all our weaknesses, that we beg Mary to give us the grace to be able to enter into the mystery of the agony of Jesus. etc².”

Devotion to the figure of T. Philippe continued. Some refused to move his furniture and belongings, and his room was transformed into a mausoleum. The anniversary of his death was added to the community’s liturgical calendar.

In this context, Jacqueline Sacré was “called” to become leader of the home in 1996. Her mandate was characterised by the issues of revitalising La Ferme and clarifying the role of G. Adam:

“At that time the group of people at La Ferme was very diverse, it took me a long time, and I still don’t understand how it managed to work [...] All of them had a very strong bond with Fr Thomas, but they couldn’t do anything together. People were passing each other by rather than meeting. At one point, when we started to make plans, I said, “We really need a place for the community. They said, “WHAT FOR? [laughs]. Unable to say, to formulate something coherent³.”

1. Interview 25

2. G. Adam, Lesson “rencontre de la ferme”, 4.10.1992.

3. Interview 20

In addition, the economic situation of La Ferme was deteriorating. The buildings were dilapidated. In this context, in 1997 the board of directors of L’Arche, the legal guardian of the Trosly community, absorbed La Ferme and its members. According to J. Vanier, this gesture was intended to “save La Ferme”, which was then in a critical situation¹.

A NEW START?

In 2000, Odile Ceyrac was appointed leader of La Ferme. The buildings were renovated using funds from “donating friends of La Ferme”², OCH³, as well as major financial support from the Fondation des Amis de L’Arche, which owned the premises and of which J. Vanier was Chair⁴. Shortly after the La Ferme team returned to the renovated premises in 2002, a new association was founded on the initiative of J. Vanier, to re-establish the independence of the place. Named “Association La Ferme de Trosly”, it was chaired by J. Vanier. T. Philippe and J. Vanier are named in Article 5 as founders⁵. The takeover by O. Ceyrac and J. Vanier was based on a subtle balance between references to T. Philippe’s legacy and the imposition of radical transformations. In 2002, on the occasion of the first board meeting of the La Ferme de Trosly association, O. Ceyrac and J. Vanier confirmed, with regard to the work:

“We would like the Garden of Paradise and Father Thomas’ grave to be done first. Sylvie is getting ready to make sure everything looks good for the official inauguration⁶.”

Similarly, in a letter addressed to the members of La Ferme, J. Vanier begins by recalling the sanctity of T. Philippe:

1. Jean Vanier, Letter to the members of La Ferme, 29 March 2005.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Minutes of the Board of Directors of “La Ferme de Trosly”, Monday 7 October 2002. AAT.

4. Jean Vanier, Letter...op. cit.

5. Statutes of the association “La Ferme de Trosly”, 2003 (filed with the sub-prefecture of Compiègne on 13 May 2002).

6. Minutes of the Board of Directors of “La Ferme de Trosly”, Monday 7 October 2002. AAT.

“Father Thomas, like the Curé d’Ars, Padre Pio and other holy priests, gathered men and women who wanted to live a life of prayer and adoration and to support him in his priestly ministry in order to bring as many people as possible to God. La Ferme was the place of welcome for these people who came to meet Father Thomas. And it is true that Father Thomas was a privileged instrument of God for many and also for each of us¹.”

He presents these initiatives as a continuum:

“The Board of Directors aimed to implement a new Ferme whose purpose was not just to keep the memory of Father Thomas, and to welcome individuals, but to be at the heart of L’Arche a spiritual centre, a community both attached to the Catholic Church and to L’Arche- two elements dear to Father Thomas.”

This does not prevent him, later in the letter, from asserting the indisputable character of a “new” construction, “renewing the vision of La Ferme”, calling for “a new way of living”. He concludes by imposing changes on the members of La Ferme, excluding them from the decision and requiring each person to respond to him personally to say whether they would remain at La Ferme:

“The constitution will be approved by the Board of Directors, the Zone Council and the Bishop but will not be put to a vote by the Farm’s members. [...] I will then ask everyone to write a letter to me as Chair and to the Board of Directors specifying your desire to be a member of La Ferme under this new constitution².”

The autonomy and uniqueness of La Ferme in the ecosystem of L’Arche were then formalised. It adopted a new constitution in 2005. It was approved not only by the association’s board of directors, but also by the Zone Council of L’Arche in France and by the Bishop of Beauvais. From 2004 onwards, Mgr Jean-Paul James visited La Ferme every year and became involved in the process of formalising La Ferme’s vocation, its constitution and the life of its members. He formulated precise requests, gave directions and stated: “I will accompany this process³”. A mandate, entrusted to the “accompanying priest of La Ferme”, was

1. Jean Vanier, Letter...op. cit.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Report on the visit of Mgr Jean-Paul James to the permanent staff of la Ferme, 18 February 2004.

drawn up by the community council of Trosly and La Ferme’s consultative assembly.

In 2006, Véronika Ottrubay was “called” to take over from O. Ceyrac as leader. She would remain in this position until 2016. According to the members, a 3-day time of prayer and reflection in 2008 would have allowed them to “receive a call” for La Ferme¹. The mission of the home was reformulated while remaining in continuity: it is a place of “welcome, spiritual support and dissemination of the spirituality of L’Arche as defined by the Charter of L’Arche communities”². La Ferme organised retreats, spiritual weekends, and ran a hospitality business. A few years later, in 2009, the “La Ferme de Trosly” association signed a membership agreement with L’Arche in France. This agreement recognises the singularity of the mission of La Ferme de Trosly in the L’Arche network.

QUESTIONS AROUND VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

At this point, we will present the trajectory of Anne-Marie Christmann in L’Arche (1968-1994), which illustrates the serious problems posed by the accompaniment provided in La Ferme by T. Philippe and then by G. Adam. The accompaniment she received from G. Adam in the “discernment” of a Carmelite vocation must be questioned.

Anne-Marie discovered the L’Arche community in Trosly-Breuil in 1989 when she came to attend the wedding of her sister who was an assistant there. She spent four and a half years there (including two years at the Val-Fleuri home and six months at the La Ferme home)³. She was 21 years old when she joined L’Arche. From a family with many siblings, she was raised in a strict Protestantism that she rejected. In 1989, according to her sister: “she was an absolute atheist⁴”. But she felt good in L’Arche and renewed her commitment year after year. She was

1. Véronika Ottrubay, “Presentation of la Ferme to the leaders of assistants in the Zone”, 2010. AAI.

2. Statutes of La Ferme de Trosly association, Article 2, 2005.

3. This journey is revealed in her correspondence with her sister Jacqueline (61 letters) and her friend Julie (13 letters) and interviews with her sister Brigitte Roux, and her friend “Nicolas” (pseudonym). Her tragic death, which was a source of deep shock for the community of Trosly-Breuil, is evoked in numerous interviews.

4. Interview 30.

appreciated, since she was given responsibilities, particularly that of the Val Fleuri home. Her health was fragile and in the summer of 1990 she suffered an episode of paralysis which forced her to stay bed-ridden for several weeks. It was there that she met "Nicolas"¹. A friendship develops between them, which evolves into a love affair that Anne-Marie declared to him but which is not shared. A distancing follows.

She was gradually taken in by the spiritual dimension of L'Arche. Community formations encouraged her towards an introspective approach, which led her to turn to Gilbert Adam. She wrote about this in a letter to her friend Julie in July 1990:

"So I went to see Gilbert [Adam] to share my deep anguish. So, for a good hour, I was able to express myself, he knew how to advise and direct me. [...] I believe I have wounds to heal and I am unable to do so alone². So I decided to send a note to Gilbert to confirm my wish to be accompanied and guided by him³."

The needs expressed here are more psychological and emotional than spiritual. But Anne-Marie explains that she "discovered in him a person she could trust⁴". Six months later, she mentions this accompaniment again:

"I asked Gilbert for a weekend to step back and have a time of sharing with him. Oh yes, I am so happy to be able to finally share, describe and say everything that is inside me to a person in whom I have acquired total confidence⁵."

On 9 February 1992, a tragic event occurred that upset Anne-Marie: the death of her fellow assistant Bernard Verbeke in a car accident. The

1. Assistant in the community.

2. Among the elements that we have been able to gather concerning A.-M. Christmann, several reveal important fragilities. Here she acknowledges her "wounds" and her "deep anguish". The two episodes of paralysis she experienced are perhaps another sign of this. Despite the series of examinations she underwent with the help of her doctor brother-in-law and her sister Brigitte, no diagnosis could be made. These neurological disorders without an organic *cause** could perhaps correspond to what psychiatrists call the conversion syndrome, previously called conversion hysteria.

3. Letter from A.-M. Christmann to Julie, 21 July 1990.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Letter from A.-M. Christmann to Julie, 7 February 1991.

loss of this close friend was the starting point for an intensification of her spiritual quest. She expressed this in a letter to her sister Jacqueline on 12 July 1992:

"This ordeal has made me discover many wonderful things. It is that in suffering, God himself can reveal himself and show himself to us. [Today, through life's experiences, I can honestly say that I have discovered God. The love of Jesus and the tenderness of Mary, the mother of Jesus! I feel so loved by God that I am sometimes ready to die if I have to, because it is as if I have reached my goal in life!]¹"

This conversion had visible effects, noticed by everyone in the community. Nicolas, who is renewing his relationship with her at this time, was astonished by this radical change:

"It was a bit excessive; she had gone from someone who could be quite cynical about religion to someone who said that if she couldn't concentrate while she was praying, it was the devil coming to distract her and all that²."

She started to envisage a religious vocation. She stayed at the Carmel of Abbeville at the beginning of December 1993 and stayed there again, in a cloister, in the summer of 1994. The date of 14 September 1994 was then set for her to enter the community. The letter she wrote to her sister at the end of August 1994 gives the impression of a decision that had been carefully thought through and serenely accepted³. However, from December 1993, a series of signs caused concern to those around her. She experienced a second episode of paralysis which began eight days after her first stay in Abbeville in December 1993. She noted that her illness began "on the 14th [December] exactly, St John of the Cross day!!!"⁴. This allusion reveals the hyperspiritualisation which she, G. Adam and certain members of the community used to describe her illness, which would last until the following May, although no medical cause was established. She spent the first few weeks at her sister's house, unable to move. G. Adam was present at her bedside and placed the Blessed Sacrament in her room. Some people around her said: "It's

1. Letter from A.-M. Christmann to Jacqueline, 12 July 1992.

2. Interview 61.

3. See letter from A.-M. Christmann to Jacqueline, 24 August 1994.

4. Letter from A.-M. Christmann to Julie, 25 August 1994.

a great mystery, the suffering. She has nothing...so many similarities with the life of little Thérèse, after all"¹. After three weeks, she began to be able to stand up and the decision was taken to move her to the La Ferme home. Agnès Humeau recalls her stay:

"Mirella, who was in charge of reception, said to me: she is very tired, she needs a comfortable room and a bit of privacy, we mustn't disturb her, it's Gilbert who will come to see her and look after her, he'll tell us if she needs anything. [...] she was very cheerful, exuberant, but you could feel that she was putting on a facade to hide a great distress, in conversations she was very elusive, you could feel a secret garden that should not be touched²."

Anne-Marie's room had an interior window overlooking the chapel. In this hyperspiritualised climate she slowly recovered. She spent the two days before the planned day of her entry into Carmel at her sister's house. But, as soon as she arrived, her moral and psychological state was concerning:

"From the moment she walked in the door, her face was transformed. The dark circles that had been there before came down, her face, her features were completely tense, a kind of mental anguish [...] It was terrible to see her like that. As if she had suddenly collapsed³."

The next day, 13 September, her sister and her husband were so worried that they contacted G. Adam and J. Vanier.

"Then there was a phone call from Jean Vanier who said, 'Anne-Marie, if you're not well, rest. A phone call from Carmel saying 'But rest, we'll defer your entry'. And so that means that Anne-Marie knew, in fact, that her malaise was beginning to be known. And then it started to get worse and worse⁴."

Anne-Marie then left the house. G. Adam was called and went to look for her but was unable to find her. A few hours later, the mayor came to announce that she had been found hanged.

The story of this trajectory and its dramatic outcome raise questions about the support she received in discerning her vocation. They are all

1. Interview 30.

2. Interview 25.

3. Interview 30.

4. Interview 30.

the more pressing because this trajectory resonates with many of the results of the commission's enquiry: firstly, the vocation is destined for the Carmelite convent of Abbeville, which we have seen was part of the scene for the "initiates"; secondly, it participated in the demonstrations of vocational effectiveness to which we have seen that T. Philippe and his successor are attached. Finally, in certain respects this account echoes those of the two women who report that they were subject to an abusive relationship at the hands of Gilbert Adam, revealing also a problematic and unbalanced practice of accompaniment, as will be shown in the following chapters.

In this particular case, there is a lack of information about the accompaniment which was provided. Nevertheless, we observe a tendency to isolate the young woman in the community, an accompanier who seems to take sole charge of the multi-faceted difficulties experienced by the young woman, and moreover by spiritualising them in an excessive manner that was characteristic of T. Philippe and his "initiates". One could conclude that because of this spiritualisation, G. Adam the accompanier remained blind to the emotional and psychological problems, of which certain signs were nevertheless visible and which should have been supported by professionals. One wonders how he and the Carmel of Abbeville could have approved Anne-Marie Christmann's vocation to lead such a demanding religious life. Moreover, a final element supports a questioning of this religious vocation. Two days before the planned date of her entry into Carmel, Anne-Marie met her friend Nicolas and advised him to become a priest, concluding, "If I hear that you are getting married, it will be very, very hurtful for me, it will be very hard. I don't think I will bear it¹."

1. Interview 61. One last element shared by her sister should be mentioned. On the very day of Anne-Marie's suicide, G. Adam asks for her diary. Her sister entrusted it to him, thinking that he was trying to understand. After the information about J. Vanier was published in January 2020, she remembered the diary and asked the priest for it, who told her he had burnt it. Also on the same day, G. Adam gave her his explanation of Anne-Marie's act: "she died out of presumption" (one of the six sins against the Holy Spirit, which consists in thinking that God's mercy is so great that the fact of sinning does not matter), once again limiting his analysis to the spiritual field and accusing Anne-Marie of having succumbed to the tempter.

AN IMPOSSIBLE BREACH OF LOYALTY?

By the early 1990s, the role played by G. Adam appeared problematic to the members in positions of responsibility:

“The hold was incredible. It was: “...and then, if you don’t follow me!” well, we were suffocating, what. Gilbert, it was... this power over people, a kind of control over people. [hesitation] I had spoken a lot about it with the community leaders at the time... Because it was no longer bearable. And the community council had even asked Gilbert [hesitation] to step back from La Ferme and not to come and give us any more talks or meetings¹.”

The records show that his feedback as a ‘priest accompanier’ are rather negative. Yet he remained in place. There was a widespread feeling at La Ferme and in the community that G. Adam was “untouchable”². When asked about this by different people in positions of responsibility, on many occasions, J. Vanier gave the impression of “not listening” and “making many excuses for”³ G. Adam. The archives reveal that other avenues were indeed explored by the community council to find a replacement for G. Adam in the community, but without success.

This situation encouraged a feeling, shared by the successive leaders of La Ferme whom we met, that G. Adam, J. Vanier and O. Ceyrac were in a “closed and confining relationship”⁴, thereby creating situations that were “hard on everyone”⁵.

In the case of J. Vanier, the protection of T. Philippe’s legacy and the practices of his disciple seem to have been accompanied by a feeling of anxiety:

“I said, “You know, Father Thomas was not a good shepherd. Because he was always talking about the good shepherd... And I felt Jean Vanier...the head and the anguish! I knew him like that. There were moments when he was only in anguish”⁶.”

1. Interview 25.
2. Interview 46.
3. Interview 25.
4. Interview 20.
5. Interview 46.
6. Interview 46

Despite the link between J. Vanier and O. Ceyrac to G. Adam, the former two repeatedly expressed their opposition – for reasons that partly escape us – to the latter becoming the chaplain of La Ferme. Could this opposition be based on a form of awareness of G. Adam’s practices, or of the poisoned nature of the legacy left by T. Philippe? The question remains open.

In 2016, Antoine Paoli succeeded Veronika Ottrubay as leader of the home. A former member of L’Arche, he had lived in three different communities (Trosly-Breuil, Paris, L’Isle-sur-la-Sorgue) between 1976 and 1994, and then worked for almost two decades as director of the La Baume Jesuit spiritual centre in Aix-en-Provence. With a solid experience to pursue the process of refoundation and normalisation of La Ferme, he negotiated in particular the departure of the remaining disciples of T. Philippe and diversified the offer of retreats and trainings. In 2019, he was succeeded by Tim Kearney, who is continuing this work of opening up and normalisation.

Conclusion : La Ferme, the new Eau Vive ?

Many aspects to the development and identity of La Ferme justify this question and provide a degree of response. La Ferme has strong similarities with L’Eau Vive. The most obvious one is that it was centred around T. Philippe, whose authority was based on an institutionalised charismatic legitimacy, which was fully autonomous and uncontrolled. Imposing his mark on both communities, it is logical that they should have common characteristics. Disorganisation was one such characteristic. Already in L’Eau Vive, T. Philippe proved to be reluctant to establish clear rules that would prevent him from following the “good pleasure” of the Holy Spirit. The contemplative dimension is a second characteristic. L’Eau Vive was “a contemplative and missionary home”. This dimension reemerged at La Ferme, where the emphasis was placed on prayer and adoration, and which viewed itself as a contemplative centre at the heart of L’Arche. Moreover, like L’Eau Vive, La Ferme was a place of conversion which encouraged vocations. Finally, both places allowed T. Philippe to perpetrate numerous examples of sexual abuse, which are set out in the following chapters.

The intellectual dimension, which was very present in the initial project of L'Eau Vive, could be perceived as an element of differentiation, since La Ferme was designed to be a place of welcome and prayer for "the poor". But this difference was only superficial. The measures imposed on T. Philippe from 1952 onwards led him and his "initiates" to develop a strong anti-intellectualism, which was present in the dynamics of Eau Vive between 1952 and 1956¹ and which reemerged in La Ferme. This anti-intellectualism is not without contradiction since, like Eau Vive, La Ferme developed training activities in which T. Philippe, the only speaker, developed his teachings at length by parodying the Thomist method.

Finally, like L'Eau Vive, La Ferme underwent a serious crisis when its founder left and struggled to continue. The absorption of La Ferme into L'Arche nevertheless allowed it to continue and to undergo a slow and painful process of dissociation. This process seems to have come to an end between 2015 and 2020 with the departure of the last disciples of T. Philippe, the gradual withdrawal of J. Vanier, and reforms that gave La Ferme a solid framework for communal life.

1. See here the text by Philippe, "L'Eau Vive et la Légion de Marie", 1954, (APJV) and the analysis made by A. Mourges, *Op. cit.*, 2009, p. 263-269. T. Philippe regrets the overly elitist and intellectual orientation of Eau Vive in its early days and recommends that it be opened up to the "people" and the "poor".

CHAPTER 14.

Seducing

Claire Vincent-Mory

Who are the women who experienced an abusive relationship with J. Vanier, the women and men in the case of T. Philippe, and the women who say they experienced such a relationship with G. Adam? How were they identified by the three of them? How did the abusive relationships begin? Without claiming to be representative, due to the number of situations for which the commission has collected a body of evidence, it is possible to identify common features amongst the profiles of people caught up in abusive or transgressive relationships, but also common features in the way in which these relationships were initiated.

Establishing a relationship of "trust"

From 1971 to the end of the 2000s, the process of seduction employed by J. Vanier seems to follow recurrent patterns. For the women in question, the first encounter with the founder was similar to that of many other L'Arche members. A few minutes of conversation between the two of them at a retreat, a conference, a katimavik (etc.) were an opportunity for J. Vanier to recruit for L'Arche. He generally extended an invitation to come to Trosly, and the young women then felt personally invited to join a human and spiritual adventure, which they thought would meet their expectations:

“He didn’t ask me, he didn’t ask any questions, he just said ‘come’. And for me it was almost like when Jesus spoke to his disciples, ‘Come!’ It was almost like...there are resonances¹.”

Some came to Trosly through a third party and met J. Vanier as part of community life. Sometimes, the first meeting may have taken place in another context outside L’Arche, such as in another religious organisation in which J. Vanier played an important role as co-founder, guide or fellow traveller (Faith and Light) or in a religious community which he regularly visited (such as the Foyer de Charité in Tressaint-France). Attentive to the “signs of the Spirit”, J. Vanier also seems to have spotted women in different, non-religious contexts, such as in the university in Canada when he was still involved in academia until the mid-1970s. For example, a woman told us how, during an academic event in which she was participating as a speaker, she was approached by J. Vanier, who was present in the audience. A game of seduction soon began between them over lunch where J. Vanier invited her to come to Trosly to visit him and discover L’Arche² – which she did.

While the L’Arche events and communities’ are not always the places where the abuse took place, they do appear as ideal settings for seduction, with the generally unwitting complicity³ of older members who invite people – sometimes insistently, as chapter 12 has shown – to meet J. Vanier, T. Philippe individually and who spread their reputation of sanctity. In the case of J. Vanier (but also of G. Adam, as we will see), the person caught in an abusive or transgressive relationship did not necessarily have to participate in community life for the relationship to develop. For example, at a recent time, a young woman left L’Arche after working as an assistant and being accompanied by J. Vanier. The accompaniment relationship continued, and abusive situations occurred afterwards, outside L’Arche.

A comparison of the different meeting setups reveals that J. Vanier always had the initiative. He is the one who, during the first and (often

1. Interview 45.

2. Interview 77.

3. In the case of T. Philippe only, our knowledge of the historical and sociological material showed that some women invited or confirmed others in their abusive relationships with him.

very) short conversation, invites the other to prolong the experience. The invitation intertwines two dimensions: discovering and experiencing the “spirit of L’Arche” and deepening an interpersonal relationship with him, as one woman testifies:

“An acquaintance wanted me to ask Jean Vanier if he could meet her, and his answer was “yes, but I won’t be able to accompany her, but if you want me to accompany you for a little while, I could do that”. So that was sort of the starting point for the relationship [...] And so, I was certainly happy to be accompanied by Jean. Even at the beginning, he was never prescriptive or very... I had never had any spiritual accompaniment before, so I can’t compare, or see how it should have been, or could have been. But I found that Jean was very attentive, very... very respectful of my own choice of path. I never felt pressured in any way... I think he was somehow happy to feel that I had a real spiritual quest¹.”

The situations all involve an initial phase of building an interpersonal relationship with J. Vanier. The relationship of trust with the founder seems to be built up gradually, sometimes over several years, in the form of “accompaniment”. While the descriptions of the format and content of these accompaniment relationships are varied, they have in common to be multidimensional and to intertwine several aspects, including spiritual, psychological, professional and vocational accompaniment: confused combinations which constitute a breeding ground for the controlling relationships that were outlined in Chapter 12. The interview with Judy Farquharson, who was a member of L’Arche in France and in India for several years from 1968 onwards, bears witness to this:

“I first came to L’Arche in the summer of 1968 to visit my cousin, not knowing anything about it. I returned a month later and spoke to Jean and asked if I could stay for the year, you know and Anne Marie said I could but that I wasn’t planned for and they couldn’t pay me anything. So, I didn’t get anything for that year. But I could stay. So, the other young people that I met, who were there, they had all heard Jean speak and came to do a year working. [...] And Pere Thomas was there and you know, everybody went to mass. (I was Anglican, not Catholic.) I remember it was in 68 that I first spoke to Pere Thomas because I wanted to receive communion. So, we spoke and whatever, he then went to the Bishop of Beauvais

1. Interview 2.

and I got permission to go to communion. So, I partook. Yeh, and I... you know, for me, there was a very strong spiritual awakening, this was before anything ... just there was something that drew me and I found a lot of peace there. [...] And I remember... I, this part was not any sort of control by Jean, but there were talks, there was a lot of talk about Third World communities starting. And I felt a desire to go to India. And so I talked with Jean about that, and he said, 'Well it's not going to be starting for at least a year'. I hadn't met Gabrielle but there was a lot of talk about her. [...] there was a new two-year nursing program starting in Toronto so I decided I would do that, so I would, then I thought, "I'll be well prepared to go to India and be a nurse. And". But I wouldn't be able to go until a year after the community started. And I think that was the summer that I became a Catholic, on a retreat that Jean gave, and he was my Godfather¹."

This account shows the presence of various ingredients that the report has already outlined: involvement as a volunteer in a L'Arche community, the expression of a spiritual quest and conversion (in this case to Catholicism), a desire for solidarity with the "Third World" and a curiosity for cultural discovery. Ten years later, another woman, "Corinne" [anonymity name], had a similar experience:

"When I arrived, after a year, I was wondering if I should commit – JV was very good at convincing me. He was a charismatic person and very good at convincing young people to join L'Arche. I then left L'Arche and Jean Vanier continued to accompany me, three times a year. When I was about 30, I was looking for my path, I was single, I was on my Christian quest, but I was lost, I didn't know what to do. Jean Vanier was very supportive, present, attentive. Influential²."

Like the previous one, this extract shows the primacy of the spiritual dimension in the multiform accompaniment offered by J. Vanier, even if he himself does not seem to have explicitly described these times together in pairs in such a manner:

"He never called it spiritual direction. It was 'Come and see me', and then we would talk, 'How are you doing...'. It was mostly about finding out how things were going in L'Arche, then saying a few words of wisdom, and then praying together³."

1. Interview 90.

2. GCPS oral interview with Corinne, noted by GCPS, 12 July 2019.

3. Interview 92.

Finally, these relationships with J. Vanier are neither hidden nor secret, nor do they need to be, insofar as they follow the same pattern of meeting and multiform accompaniment that is well known in L'Arche communities and from which many other people benefit. Therefore, even when the content of the accompaniment time changes to include touching justified by elements of mystical-sexual belief, the relationships do not need to become secret ("Many knew of our friendship, but that was it. And he had plenty of friends"¹). Furthermore, we would emphasise that although J. Vanier's efforts to groom and establish trust in these women seem to have taken place primarily during these special times of interpersonal accompaniment, they also progressively took place in many other situations, "with him in the midst of other people"², during a working session, at an event, or at an ordinary moment in community life.

In the case of T. Philip, the process of seduction followed the same remarkably consistent pattern throughout. From the beginning of his ministry, and particularly during the period of L'Eau Vive, he devoted a considerable amount of time to meeting people individually, either for advice, spiritual direction or for the administration of a sacrament. Depending on the period, these could be nuns from convents in which he hears confession and offers direction, students, but also anyone who asked him. The first two parts of the report have provided an overview of the diversity of this audience.

During his 28 years in L'Arche (from his arrival in Trosly in 1963 until his departure in 1991), T. Philippe unsurprisingly continued to spend many hours each week receiving, directing or administering a sacrament to anyone who asked him. All the people he abused went to meet him his first bedroom-cum-office in Miss Gsell's house in Trosly, then in his bedroom-cum-office at La Ferme from the 1970s onwards. As for J. Vanier, the environment in L'Arche played an important role: women and men who were followers and admirers of T. Philippe strongly encouraged newcomers to Trosly to meet him, some even offering to act as interpreters for non-French speakers. A woman, identified as "T. Philippe's secretary", organised the requests for appointments.

1. Interview 52.

2. Interview 52.

In his case, but particularly in that of G. Adam, the interviews with people caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship highlight a veritable seduction campaign, skilfully employing thoughtfulness, small gestures, availability, great gentleness, and marks of affection that appeared at first sight to be of the order of paternal affection. Elodie expresses the feeling of having “received a great deal” from G. Adam, i.e. both a great deal of time and energy for discussion on subjects that were challenging her (“he gave of himself”, “we talked a great deal”), but also materially (“many gifts, donations of money”, “whenever I needed t”)¹. Pauline, a member of L’Arche who testified that she had been sexually abused by G. Adam for 10 years (1996-2006), describes one of the first signs of attention she felt she had received as follows:

“In the middle of the meal he put a little Salad heart [sic] on my plate, he was very kind, full of joy and life, of spontaneity and that made me very happy, this little gesture that was very kind and thoughtful and that also made me feel at ease, very fraternal. And then I thought, ‘It’s Jesus who is giving me his heart’, because for me, at that time, I saw in the priest, through his ordination and the grace he had received, the representative of God².”

This quote introduces an additional dimension that is common to the victims of T. Philippe and the people who claim to have been victims of G. Adam in L’Arche, and to which we will return later: the idealisation and sacralisation of the figure of the priest, which facilitates the establishment of relationships of control.

Finally, the overview of grooming methods would not be complete if we did not mention cases, which are admittedly not very common based on what we currently know, but which nevertheless occurred several times: e the passing on a future victim by another abuser. For example, Michèle-France Pesneau described the sordid way in which M.-D. Philippe, who had sexually abused her for several years, had invited her to go and experience other “mystical graces” with his brother T. Philippe, which she then suffered for the next two decades. In at least one case brought to the attention of the Commission (J. Farquharson),

1. Interview 53.

2. Pauline’s written testimony to the Officiality of the Archdiocese of Paris, 25 January 2014, Pauline’s Personal Archive (APP).

J. Vanier’s sexual abuse was prolonged by her experience of sexual assault at the hands of T. Philippe, from whom she had come to seek help and advice in order to escape an abusive relationship that she did not understand and in which she felt trapped.

What can be said about the profile of people caught up in abusive or transgressive relationships?

It is impossible to define a precise socio-demographic profile due to the length of the period covered by the events (from the 1950s to the 2010s, based on what we currently know), but also due to the diversity of nationalities and cultural backgrounds.

We will limit ourselves to underlining that the people caught in an abusive or transgressive relationship with J. Vanier of whom we are aware of are all women, of full age, without a disability, Christian (mostly Catholic, but with no particular Catholic profile being dominant¹), with a high cultural capital (university studies², multilingualism). Half of them come from privileged social backgrounds (i.e. highly endowed with economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital) and are from aristocratic or *grand-bourgeois* families. There seems to be a form of social proximity in the choice of people caught in an abusive or transgressive relationship. When the first mystico-sexual acts were initiated, almost all of these women were young adults (20-35 years old). They were single, married,

1. For example, the typology of Catholics in France established in 2014 by Yann Raison du Cleuziou, describing four “nebulae” of the “conciliar”, the “observant”, the “charismatic” and the “emancipated”, however useful and relevant it may be for analysing a complex French Catholic reality, does not prove insightful with regard to the situation we are studying for the reasons we mention in the body of the text (extent of the time period; cultural, national diversity). Yann Raison du Cleuziou, *Qui sont les cathos aujourd’hui ? Sociologie d’un monde divisé*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2014.

2. The trend of an academic background amongst the women we met cannot be considered as a significant marker of the profile of people who experienced an abusive or transgressive relationship with J. Vanier. It may also be an effect of our qualitative survey method: literature in the humanities and social sciences has largely demonstrated the biases inherent in the selection of respondents, particularly the forms of withdrawal and maintaining silence on the part of those less endowed with cultural capital, which often attests to a feeling of illegitimacy and a not being accustomed to speaking publicly.

or had taken religious vows. Finally, these women came from 4 European countries and Canada and speak different languages.

Particularly in the cases of T. Philippe and G. Adam, it can be said that the people recruited fit the profile of the “pious girl”, i.e. having received a gendered education “which emphasised “obedience and piety” “discretion, marked by “a family taboo on sexuality”, an insistence on Catholic morality and discipline – which would in many cases result in naivety or even emotional and sexual immaturity in adulthood. Numerous studies in the human and social sciences, but also in psychology, have shown how a person with this profile was particularly at risk of being “incapable of identifying a sexual advance or act” and of reacting with “docility” – despite doubts – to solicitations from a cleric¹.

It seems that all these women shared an active spiritual quest at the time of their abusive or transgressive relationship, which was manifested in particular by the discernment of a religious vocation (“I had a pure spiritual desire and quest”²). The accounts show that J. Vanier initiated abusive behaviour, which he justified by a mystical-sexual or mystical-emotional belief to women, some of whom had taken religious vows, and others of whom were seriously considering a religious vocation at that time. Others were young converts to Catholicism (sometimes after having experienced a spiritual quest in different horizons – Zen, Buddhism, etc.) and J. Vanier was also the godfather of one of them (J. Farquharson). In the case of a number of trajectories, J. Vanier played a determining role in a personal path of conversion and in vocational choices made. The question of commitment to celibacy in and for L'Arche is a focal issue in discussions with J. Vanier.

The particular attention paid to people who were expressing a call to a religious vocation (whether they were in discernment, lived probationary periods in religious communities or had already taken religious vows) is a common feature for identifying people caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship with J. Vanier, T. Philippe and in those reported concerning G. Adam. With regard to T. Philippe, the period from the 1940s to the 1956 trial was marked by the initiation of contemplative nuns or young lay women leaving behind a religious life or preparing to

1. *Sexual violence in the Catholic Church ...op. cit.*, p.108,

2. Interview 91.

enter such a life. They were all young women from the aristocracy or the French Catholic middle and higher bourgeoisie. After the period of alienation and from the founding of L'Arche in 1964, and more specifically from the founding of La Ferme in 1972, we can see that the profiles became more diverse. The social backgrounds of the victims are more heterogeneous, as are their nationalities (American, French, Canadian). In addition, alongside lay women who had left religious life or were going through discernment regarding their religious vocation, married or single women were also amongst the targeted victims. However, in common with the former these women had revealed to T. Philippe that they were exploring (or had explored) the vocation of a religious life. One woman sexually assaulted by T. Philippe said that she felt that expressing to him her intimate call to a religious vocation had triggered him sexually touching her.. Finally, the same is true for G. Adam. For him, the question of a spiritual quest and religious vocation seems to have been a determining factor in his choice of the two people who claim to have been caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship with him. For example, he gave himself the role of confidant for Pauline, accompanying and advising her in the discernment of a Carmelite vocation, and meeting her daily to administer the sacrament of reconciliation over several years.

The trajectories allow us to identify another category of factors that are common to those successfully groomed for mystico-sexual practices. The language used by the people we met who were caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship had a second point in common: at the time of the encounter with the abuser, several women stated that they were in a state of psychological ‘fragility’¹. M-F. Pesneau describes her state of mind when she met M.-D. Philippe, who abused her spiritually, psychologically and sexually for more than two decades, as follows:

1. We do not claim that the women and men who have experienced an abusive or transgressive relationship had “psychological fragility” during the periods in question – we do not have the necessary competence, materials or the intention to do so. We simply note the recurrence of this dimension in their narratives during the interviews with us. The majority of these people have since received psychological support by a qualified person, outside of L'Arche, and, as far as we know, what they said in the interview was based on the personal work they had done for themselves. knowledge, the comments made in the interviews are based on the personal work they have done in this work they have done in this context.

“When Marie-Dominique Philippe intervened in my life, I was in a state of great psychological and spiritual suffering. He listened to me attentively and compassionately. He appeared to me then as ‘my saviour’. [I think that in my naive eyes, Father Marie-Dominique had come to “cure” my state of psychological and spiritual death. He had certainly spotted my fragility, that I found it difficult to say no and to oppose a person in a position of authority. I had full confidence in him, which was strengthened by his reputation for holiness amongst my Carmelite sisters¹.”

Similarly, D. Maronde Varnau, who was sexually assaulted by T. Philippe in 1975, describes her psychological situation at the time of her encounter with him as follows:

“During this [Ignatian] retreat, I experienced quite deep psychological distress. At the same time, I projected exceptional qualities onto this Jesuit Father, as if he were my saviour. Unfortunately, he was unable to help me with the psychological aspects of my suffering. When I returned to Trosly after the retreat, I felt broken and hopeless. I decided to go and talk to Father Thomas. I was very vulnerable, and I felt comforted and reassured when I sat with him. I saw him as kind, old -like a saint. I shared my projections of the young Jesuit, and my desires to have a man in my life, beloved. As I shared my story with him, I noticed that his left arm had slipped from my shoulder to my back, and his left hand was now on my left breast. I didn’t know what to think, but I thought, ‘It must be because my heart is hard, and he is trying to break my stony heart with his energy².’”

The mention of a state of fragility also recurs – although less systematically – in the narrative of people caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship with J. Vanier. Several of them stressed that they had been confronted with significant and painful personal and family problems (deaths, romantic break-ups, family difficulties, abortion, unwanted pregnancy, etc.), or health problems (eating disorders, depressive disorders, etc.), for which they had sought J. Vanier’s help, advice and company.

1. M.-F. Pesneau, *op cit.* p.69.

2. Testimony to AVREF by Donna Maronde Varnau under the pseudonym “Mary Donnelly”, accessed on 12 August 2022., URL: <https://www.avref.fr/temoignage-de-mary-donnelly.html>

The ingredients of a configuration of control

The diverse nature of the recruitment processes shows the recurrent presence of a set of ingredients likely to that were likely to encourage controlling relationships¹. Firstly, the relationships could take the form of relationships of salvation, in which the groomed individuals believe J. Vanier, T. Philippe, or G. Adam to be their saviour:

“He actually saved my life. I mean, if only it could have happened without all that... But he would say that it was at the price of all that².”

The term ‘saviour’ regularly surfaces in the interviews and in the testimonies of those involved in abusive or transgressive relationships with the three men.

Secondly, the language used by the people caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship indicates a feeling of admiration, or even fascination, for their accompanier to whom they attribute many qualities, a potential sanctity, as well as a charismatic authority which, in the case of J. Vanier, borrows from the three registers identified in Chapter 11 – namely his prophetic qualities, his ability to establish and maintain a close and interpersonal bond of trust, and his clairvoyance. Moreover, several women *subsequently* acknowledged that they responded favourably to his “call” to come to Trosly to see him more often, convinced that they were privileged, that they had been spotted, chosen and would now be accompanied by the great man. This was the case of Ivy:

“I was searching for what to do and, I mean, I think, looking at my diaries, I think a big factor was Jean. [...] I was aware other people were going to see him, but I felt it was... a good thing that. [silence] You know, “wow, I’m, I’m able to go and see the founder of all of this, because he is in the community here”. I didn’t... “and other people are going to see him and you know, and I’m aware of other people coming from far afield to see him. And he was meeting lots of people, and journalists and he was travelling³...”

Thirdly, we observe in all three cases that this sequence of grooming and the establishment of a relationship of trust springs from a form of

1. For a definition of control, a soft, gradual, hard-to-detect form of domination based on asymmetric holds, see the last sub-section of Chapter 12.

2. Interview 53.

3. Entretien 45.

hold which can be qualified as a vocational hold: meaning that it uses the pretext of accompaniment for vocational discernment to establish the legitimacy of the initiator of the abusive acts' authority and to reinforce the chances that he will be obeyed. The person being accompanied feels "called", "chosen", "elected" by another who, through the authority of vocation (the priest), his charismatic authority (the prophet), his status in L'Arche and the notoriety that he enjoys within the L'Arche space, the Catholic space, but also more widely in other societal spaces, is himself considered to be chosen or elected by God, or even sacralised. The vocational hold is also based on an illusion, which is particularly present in the culture of the Catholic Church. According to this illusion, any interaction with a person endowed with vocational authority, with a "chosen one" or "between chosen ones", would be in principle asexual¹. This implicit belief, found in most of the interviews, particularly those with the victims of T. Philippe and the women who claim to be victims of G. Adam, associates particularly well with a culture and social norms (discussed above in the case of the pious girl) codifying all sexualised behaviour as inappropriate: in this case, individuals "have difficulty recognising the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate [...] interaction. Adults are often ill-equipped to manage their sexual desires [...] young people are often unable to resist the sexual advances of adults"².

Fourthly, in the case of T. Philippe and his disciple G. Adam, both priests, this "vocational" hold is articulated along with a hold that can be described as "sacramental", particularly effective with people from a practising Catholic background. This form of hold is based on "the instrumentalization of [sacramental] rites to which the faithful can only have access through the cleric, insofar as he is – as defined by Pierre Bourdieu: "the agent of a priestly body which, as such, holds the monopoly over the legitimate handling of the benefits of salvation"³.

1. On the belief in 'gender atypia' or the 'angelic' character of the Catholic priest, a man who 'sacrificed sexuality', and its consequences, see for example Constance Lalo, Josselin Tricou, 'Si cet homme n'avait pas été prêtre... Patriarcalité du pouvoir, script catholique et pédocriminalité dans l'Eglise', *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'Histoire critique*, n°147, 2020, p.76.

2. *Sexual violence in the Catholic Church ...op. cit.*, p.109.

3. This sociological use of the term "sacramental hold" is quite different from the term "sacramental hold" used in Catholic theology. The sociological expression is intended

Finally, the establishment of these configurations of control owes much to the unwitting complicity of the communities in which they operated. Being 'accompanied' was part of the ordinary life of any member of the community (in Trosly as elsewhere), as was exercising one's Catholic piety and having recourse to the sacraments, in Trosly in particular, and even more so in La Ferme. For some, the family was (spiritually, geographically) close to the community and "trusted" the priest, the community and its members, as Pauline's case shows:

"No one ever asked me about my coming and going once or twice a week and coming back so late. It's true that there was no surveillance there, you could come and go in the village, day and night, meet the priest¹ at any time if necessary. Many did, especially [another woman], who like me went every day to confess to Father Gilbert Adam. So nobody really noticed, even my parents. There was a small group, a community, that revolved around Father Gilbert Adam. This irritated some people, and also many people in the community did not do that²."

The grooming and establishment of power relationships was all the easier as there was no effective challenge, no real counterweight that would have been able to hinder the process.

While in some cases this grooming process was effective and achieved its objectives, it should be acknowledged that this was not always the case, as we will see later. When approached, some women and men

to mean the instrumentalisation of a sacrament as part of a process of hold and its misappropriation, for the personal benefit of a cleric, *Ibid.* p.63-64. "This "device of transversal hold employed by abusive clerics lies in the sacred office of the rites, within which the clerics, as the only legitimate dispensers of the benefits of salvation in Catholicism, are supposed to act *in persona christi* according to the Catholic tradition: namely the sacraments, but also a certain number of para-sacramental practices, which were until recently reserved for priests such as the "guidance of conscience". The instrumentalisation of this sacred office is strategically aimed at overcoming any resistance and/or ensuring the subsequent silence of those who have been abused. [...] the sacramental control [may] be activated through other rituals, especially to silence people. For example, when the abused person agrees, albeit reluctantly, to their abuser marrying them in church or baptising their children, the 'sacred' nature of these other sacraments reinforces the shame they feel and makes the violence suffered even more unspeakable." *Ibid.*, p. 108.

1. Capitalisation by the author.

2. Testimony of Pauline, quoted text, APP.

quickly identified and refused the sexual advances made to them, thus defeating the process of control and cutting short any attempted use of the argumentation underpinned by mystical-sexual beliefs. Thus, for example, Donna Maronde Varnau, who was subjected to inappropriate sexual touching by T. Philippe, as described in her own testimony in the preceding pages, says that she reacted as follows:

“Then I noticed that he had taken my right hand, which he had been holding warmly and tenderly until then and was now holding it in his lap in the crotch area and pressing gently. I thought to myself, 'No, it's not what you think....' Finally, he turned to me and said, 'Take Jesus in your arms' ... so I wrapped my arms around him, finding this very odd and unwelcome, but still trying to remain open to understanding these actions. Perhaps he wanted to show me what it is like to love and 'hold' Jesus in a concrete way...and a priest is the representative of Jesus. I came out of this moment of 'spiritual direction' with a very strange impression. That same evening I did not feel well and had stayed in my room. I was all alone in the building. Father Thomas came to visit me. When he came into the room, he sat next to me on the bed. When he tried to put his arm around me, I recoiled. A voice inside me said, 'You dirty old man'. It was like a light switched on in my head. When I told him to fuck off, his face transformed into that of a rejected teenager. After that episode, I felt unsettled. A priest with a reputation for holiness, the 'holy priest of L'Arche', had turned into a 'dirty old man'. It was as if God had turned into the devil. There was no one I could have talked to about this. No one would have believed me. I left L'Arche a few months later, barely able to function independently¹.”

1. Quoted testimony from Donna Maronde, quoted text.

CHAPTER 15. What happened?

Claire Vincent-Mory

The situations, gestures and acts considered in this chapter are varied. Some acts of sexual aggression or abuse took place as part of a controlling relationship. However, others did not, as the case of D. Maronde Varnau shows – which does not affect their severity. Nevertheless they must be analysed together to the extent that they form part of a continuum of sexual violence¹ marked by the experience of control, abuse of authority and, more generally, by the confusion of the spiritual, emotional and sexual spheres.

1. As the editors of the French translation of Liz Kelly's famous article point out, the term “continuum of sexual violence” does not mean the “relativising the severity of violence or equating between forms and effects”, but rather serves as a reminder that these multiple forms are structurally interconnected through the domination and appropriation of women's bodies by men (Liz Kelly, “The Continuum of Sexual Violence”, vol.1, no.6, 2019, p.17 [1987]). In this chapter, we use the term ‘continuum of sexual violence’ because it allows us to describe the range and variety of abusive and coercive behaviours women and men are confronted by (Kelly, 2019, p.21). It aims examine the links between behaviours that are considered ‘normal’, and others that are usually considered ‘abnormal’ – in order to better understand them (Kelly, 2019, p.25). Thus, the ‘continuum of sexual violence’ perspective invites us to examine together a number of incidents, gestures and words that are difficult to distinguish or separate from each other; it also allows for the fact that women and men ‘may not define a specific incident in the same way’; and that lived experiences ‘may be redefined over time’ by the people who have experienced them (Kelly, 2019, p.32) – which is precisely the situation faced by our enquiry. From a social sciences analysis perspective, it is understood that a specific incident will not have a fixed, unambiguous and universally shared definition.

Abuse by Jean Vanier

From the late 1960s to 2010 and beyond, the situations involving J. Vanier we were told about are distinguished by their gradual approach (taking up to a decade in one case). Over time, proximity and tactile gestures gradually intensify during prayer and accompaniment (holding hands, heads close together, foreheads touching, hugging each other). One young woman recounts her experience in the following way:

“I do remember it, like sometimes he would have his head on my chest. Because this is kind of like this heart-to-heart thing, you know, and I guess he was operating out of that image of Saint John, leaning his head on the breast of Jesus and... I guess I had the experience he was resting on my heart, you know, and that somehow that was nourishing him. [...] And then I remember one time like I was wearing this medallion of Our Lady or something, and I could see the imprint on his cheek where he had been. And I said: “Oh, I can see that” he’s like trying to grab it up, then: “Is it gone?” You know like he was concerned about privacy or the secrecy, I guess you could say so. And then also, I guess I saw him often doing that retreat. And so, at one point... [silence] He just suddenly, suddenly he is on his knees in front of me and sort of, I guess somehow, he had his hands in my lap. And I just didn’t know what this was about, you know, and he said: “I love you”. So that was like, Oh OK, you know, then I understand. And so, then I think I probably embraced him, you know, I love you too, sort of thing. And I don’t... my memory’s a bit unclear, about the posture... but we were kind of just in silence, sort of lying together and held each other somehow for a long time. Wordless, you know, and then... Then that was that, and then he kissed me, kissed me on the lips. But, you know, without opening his mouth or anything. So, you know, it struck me at the time, that was a very chaste kiss, you know, and I just... I had the sense that he was really controlled in his gestures¹.”

The posture described by this young woman (on his knees, with his head resting on her chest) is regularly described by other “accompanied” women, including when they were accompanied by other “accompaniers” such as T. Philippe, but also M.-D. Philippe or G. Adam. According to their accounts, both the accompanier and the accompanied could be in this position, preferably leaning on the bare chest of the one remaining seated. This gesture is a strange interpretation of a

1. Interview 92.

passage in St. John’s Gospel describing the gesture of the apostle John leaning towards Jesus during the Last Supper (see chapter 2). Similar forms of touching¹ are found in the various accounts of these accompaniment sessions, including, in particular “passionate, voluptuous kisses on the mouth of increasing intensity”, and caresses on the erogenous zones of both parties, especially the female breast. In several cases, the touching progressed to what could be considered sexual assault² :

“We had had certain [hesitation] mentoring, you know, counselling sessions, and in his office where it would, you know, the heads would come together and they’d be touching, but nothing much. [...] that was [hesitation] on the edge, but it was, I guess it was just this is a prayerful, gentle touch or whatever. [...] It started on 71 when I spent those months at L’Arche [Trosly]. Yeah, because before that, it had been nothing like that. And so, just it was like grooming³, I guess grooming and a little bit more familiar. And I would see him a lot like every other night [...] I would go talk to him. But just talk. Yeah. Yeah, there might have been prayer, but simply just heads bowed, that’s all. Notto the extent it was really in 71 and then [...] I don’t know, three weeks was this invitation to meet him in Paris. He gave me the key. You know, “come at a certain time”. And then I found out later it was Jacqueline’s apartment. [...] Well, let me say it was more for him than me, in terms of... and I can’t see any of it was

1. The word ‘touching’ is not a legal term in French law. We use it here to refer to non-consensual sexual contact by one person on another, usually with the hand, on areas considered by the persons involved to be sexual: the breast, the buttocks, the genitals.

2. According to its current legal meaning in France (since the 2018 reform of the Penal Code), sexual assault refers to any sexual assault involving physical contact committed with violence, coercion, threats or surprise, without the clear and explicit consent of the victim. For clarity, “coercion” also implies “moral coercion”, it being understood that no testimony received by the Commission to date has indicated any physical or verbal violence or threats in the case of the situations involving J. Vanier. While the Commission is in no position and has no desire to interfere in a judicial process, the use of the term “sexual assault” here seems useful to the author of the statement in order to effectively describe (without unnecessary clumsiness) the acts that were reported and are cited.

3. In this context, the term ‘grooming’ spontaneously used by this woman during the interview refers to ‘sexual grooming’, defined by the US justice system as, for example, ‘Sexual grooming is a preparatory process in which a perpetrator gradually gains a person’s or organisation’s trust with the intent to be sexually abusive.’. The process of “grooming” involves targeting a victim; securing access to and isolating the victim; gaining the victim’s trust; and controlling and concealing the relationship. (Daniel Pollack and Andrea MacIver, ‘Understanding Sexual Grooming in Child Abuse Cases’, *Child Law Practice*, Vol. 34 No. 11, Nov. 2015, p.161)..

particularly satisfying, but he would come sometimes. [...] And there was always this continual flow of Jesus and Mary, and of words. [...] So, that would be like partially unclothed. I was never fully naked, nor was he. And maybe different with different people[hesitation] I have to say that was my first sexual experience, so, it has strongly marked me... That night I'm talking about¹."

In a written testimony sent to L'Arche, J. Farquharson says of this episode, which would have lasting and important psychological consequences on her: "It was very intimate – he did everything but full sex. It was very intimate². "What she now describes as "sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse" was repeated over the years that followed, apparently depending on J. Vanier's opportunities to travel:

"In India, I would go to his room, I had to cross a courtyard with snakes at night to get there. And when I think about it, I'd go there and go back and, you know, and it's like the servant... But it would be, you know, a physical touch and gestures, and he would come, and I would just wonder what was going on. Well, I didn't feel like there was a whole lot... I was just the hand-made. [...] I just thought that's the way it was, that's how you did this Jesus and Mary thing..."

"I did many trips between Canada, Trosly, India between 1971 and 74. During one of my times in Canada, Jean Vanier was speaking in prisons (in Canada), I travelled with him and would be the last to see him at night for "prayers" involving physical sexual touch. There were a couple of retreats I attended as well where similar things happened³."

Other women's testimonies described similar experiences, both during the same period and in later decades. Among the recurring points, we would stress the partial nudity, the absence of intercourse, as well as the use of a discourse of justification which is presented in detail in the following chapter. The absence of intercourse as well as the spiritual justification for sexual aggression led Vanier – as others have done, as we shall see – to consider this a non-sexual practice or, one might say, "chaste sexuality". There are also recurring features in the organisational set-up. The places where J. Vanier's abusive accompaniments sessions took

1. Interview 90.

2. Notes from the oral testimony of J. Farquharson to GCPS, June 2019.

3. Interview 90 then notes from J. Farquharson's oral testimony to GCPS, June 2019.

place were frequently places located in the L'Arche community space. In Trosly, the successive rooms/offices of J. Vanier seem to have been one of the preferred places. However, several testimonies revealed that J. Vanier had access to more discreet spaces, such as accommodation belonging to third parties – Jacqueline d'Halluin's Paris flats, in particular, were made available to several of the perpetrators of sexual abuse referred to in our report. In addition, among these more discreet places, we have identified monastic sites where J. Vanier stayed for times of rest or for retreats or events at which he "gave the Word". The written and oral testimonies of people caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship indicate a certain caution and, it seems, an awareness on the part of J. Vanier of the need to conceal his closeness to certain women. For example, while visiting him at a monastery where Vanier was on a holiday, after having experienced one of his "special accompaniment" sessions in the monastery cell where he was staying, Ivy said that she observed how careful Vanier was to maintain a certain physical distance and to "behave himself" when they were both in the presence of the monks¹. Moreover, while appointments with J. Vanier were sometimes made together by the two protagonists, they were frequently arranged with the help of J. Vanier's secretary who took care of his schedule. As revealed in the correspondence to which we have had access, J. Vanier often took the initiative in suggesting appointments, and the meeting slots are almost always suggested and set by J. Vanier, sometimes late at night.

The above description would not be complete without the addition of two further details. Firstly, the abusive acts took place over different periods of time. While two of the cases reported related to one incident, all the other cases of accompaniment involving all the acts we have described lasted for several years, or even several decades. They were always preceded and often followed by relationships of accompaniment lasting several months or years without touching or ambiguous gestures, which then became 'spaced out'² until they gradually stopped. Secondly, to understand what we are talking about here, it is important to note that several women experienced abuse at the same time. As the

1. Interview 45.

2. Interview 52.

written and oral material collected by the commission proves, there was no exclusivity and several abusive accompaniments may have taken place with different women at the same time. Moreover, several women say they were aware of this very early on:

“I went to Jean Vanier’s room during the night. I always wondered who came before or after me. I knew in my heart that there were other people with whom he had ‘special’ relationships¹. “

Also, because he considers these experiences to be “chaste sexuality”, Vanier was indiscriminate in inviting women who were single, in a relationship, married² or who had taken religious vows of chastity; women who were already sexually active; or women who had never had a sexual experience with a partner. The interviews we conducted covered all of these cases.

Abuse by Thomas Philippe

The same multiplicity (different life states and the concurrence of abusive relationships) is found among the women who are victims or survivors of T. Philippe. In this and other respects, the “special relationships” initiated by J. Vanier show similarities to the abuse initiated by his master T. Philippe. We therefore note the systemic physical proximity and tactile gestures during the times of accompaniment/confession, but also the absence of coitus³. However, the interviews, testimonies and correspondence reveal that the sexual abuse committed by T. Philippe differs from that committed by J. Vanier in – it seems – its nature, frequency and violence. Chapter 2 described those which had been identified by the Vatican investigation in the 1950s and for which he was convicted in 1956. The autobiographical work of Michèle-France Pesneau, a member of L’Arche

1. Interview 90.

2. To the Commission’s knowledge, there was only one case of a woman married before the start of her “relationship” with J. Vanier.

3. T. Philippe did not always practice “chaste sexuality” without coitus, as the abortion of A. de Rosambo testifies. In his case, it is possible that the absence of coitus was not really a doctrinal point, but rather a pragmatic compromise given the associated “risks”. A woman who was a victim of T. Philippe in the 1970s testified that he told her that “this way there are no risks, it’s safer”

for more than four decades, who suffered sexual, spiritual and psychological abuse by T. Philippe at Trosly for many years, is eloquent on this point¹. Without repeating what her testimony expresses so clearly, we would like to emphasise several useful aspects for the analysis we develop in this chapter.

First, the most recent cases of abuse committed by T. Philippe which the Commission was informed about (early 1990s) have many elements in common with those of the early 1950s, due to their violence and their intrication with a situation of spiritual and psychological abuse. In 1952, a nun gave the following account of her experience:

“He made me kneel down and put both his hands on my head for a long time. I started to tremble, he took me against him and put my head on his chest. I had no outward reaction. In the next interview, [...] after praying with me and speaking to me at length about the Sacred Heart of Jesus, his flame of love, his fire of love, he uncovered his chest and told me to rest on the Heart of Our Lord and to be consumed in his love. Little by little he placed his hands on my heart, untied my corsage and took my breast, asking me if I was afraid. I was in no way disturbed and replied that I was not. At the next interview, he dared to caress my sexual parts. I had no external reaction either, because I thought I would die of fright and could not speak or move because I was so horrified. He perceived my confusion and asked me if I was afraid. When I answered in the affirmative, he made no further attempt and let me go, blessing me with great gentleness. I cannot say what happened in the following interviews, how he put my conscience to sleep. [...] I will only mention the facts – Father subjected me to all sorts of lechery, invoking the above reasons. He made me go up to his room, undressed me, undressed himself, made me lie in his bed, and indulged in all sorts of caresses. He experienced a real sexual pleasure and asked me many times to drink the sperm telling me to drink from the Heart of N.S. He never had normal conjugal relations at least with me. I will not give any more details since less is more².”

Several decades later, other women are telling similar sad stories. As far as we know, the violence of the assaults and rapes³ committed by

1. *Op. cit.*

2. Testimony of M. Brunet, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

3. According to contemporary French legal vocabulary, rape is defined as “an act of sexual penetration committed on the victim or on the perpetrator involving violence, constraint,

T. Philippe caused at least two women members of L'Arche to suffer partial traumatic amnesia, i.e. a temporary loss of memory caused by the trauma. J. Farquharson was successively abused by J. Vanier and then by T. Philippe:

"I went to see Père Thomas for advice. I wanted to speak about my "secret" relationship with Jean Vanier and also about the pressure I was feeling from him to return to India. I think I went twice, maybe. So, there's the sofa and you sit side by side. It's not facing each other. And but he would just take my hands and put my head on his shoulder... I never got to tell him about Jean. We were just talking and then I think it was only after two visits he said "viens ce soir, vers 10h, frappez à la porte" you know, the back door. "Frappez fort, parce que je suis sourd" [laughs] So, there's the French again, see... I don't know, I thought it was just going to be a late visit or something. And then, you know, he took me to his sleeping area and then he was immediately like lying down, putting his robes up and right into it. And talking the same words. So, I felt like it was back in the spider web, you know? At one point [hesitation] he did take off his robe – the first few times just he would put it up and he wore long underwear and that would come down or he would put his hand there – And... really, that was more about him, for sure. Before I had had a chance to talk about my concerns about Jean Vanier, similar things (physical, sexual) started with him as well. He was not as tender as Jean Vanier, but the same gestures, words like "chosen, special, Jesus and Mary and mystical union" were used along with physical and sexual expression, everything except full intercourse. And his eyes would be rolling in his head. It was like, like he was having a vision or is it crazy? I don't know [sighs]. I just want to say he was an animal! I'm sorry... I was left feeling even more confused, alone, feeling no one would understand. I left Trosly and L'Arche soon after and never spoke about my "secrets" for many years until I started therapy¹."

In an interview with the Commission, she spoke of the partial traumatic amnesia caused by the rapes:

threat or surprise (in the latter case, the victim is deceived by the cunning of the aggressor)". Any act of sexual penetration is covered: vaginal, anal or oral. Penetration may be with the rapist's penis, with his fingers or with an object. Once again, without any intention of interfering in a judicial process or in a legal characterisation of the facts, we use this term for ease of reference to refer to the act of sexual penetration.

1. This account has been partially re-edited by inserting elements from a 2019 interview with J. Farquharson into the transcript of interview 90.

"You know, I mean, I blanked. I mean, I really blanked out. So, I mean, I think it did a real number on my head. With Père Thomas. That was just like, there's no hope. And then I don't know how long it was before my friend came. And it was, you know, I don't know if I would have, how long it would have taken me to gather myself together to actually leave, you know? So, yeah, I was not in a good place¹."

Much less geographically mobile than J. Vanier, despite a few occasional stays abroad, T. Philippe made his bedroom-cum-office (particularly at La Ferme, from the early 1970s onwards) his preferred place to abuse the people who peacefully came to see him. M-F. Pesneau provides a precise description of the place:

"He continues to make regular appointments for me late at night: it is agreed that I wait for him in the chapel, and that he will come to fetch me when he is free of the many "clients" who are waiting for him for advice, comfort, absolution, or even to settle internal conflicts at La Ferme – there are many of them. He leaves his lodgings, situated opposite the chapel, on the other side of the cloister, by the back door, and it is also by this door that he lets me in. This dwelling, which some irreverent assistants have nicknamed "Uncle Tom's hut", is very well designed for discreet meetings: it has three entrances. The most frequented, the one for everyone, opens onto the courtyard of La Ferme; there are two doors, for greater discretion. The second, which opens onto the cloister, gives direct access to the "bedroom" area, which is only separated from the office where the Father receives guests by a cupboard. In his office, Father Thomas receives his visitors on a two-seater sofa, = inviting his interlocutor to sit beside him, which enables him to make gestures of "fatherly tenderness", or more if he feels he can go further without taking too many risks. There is one last entrance, through a small room where Father Thomas takes his meals and which also has a door leading to the cloister. I have never used this door, nor have I ever entered the small room in question, but on at least one occasion Father Thomas has rushed me into the end of the corridor leading to it because of a nocturnal visitor which he was not expecting and who he dispatches quite quickly (I think it was a visitor), and then we pick up "things" where they left off. Next to his bed, Father has arranged two chairs, one at the head, where he lays his clothes- not without piously kissing his habit before putting it down, and I think also before putting it back on, and a second chair at the foot of the

1. Interview 90.

bed, for his partner's clothes. When he is keen, he can be very organised. For example, he never makes a mistake with his night-time appointments (or at nap time, or sometimes even very early in the morning), whereas he often makes appointments with several different people for the same time slot when it's a "normal" appointment¹."

Abuse attributed to G. Adam

As the first historical chapters of this report have shown, T. Philippe trained many disciples in his school during his lifetime. According to the information gathered by the Commission so far, it appears that at least two members of L'Arche (one man and one woman) reproduced the abusive format of their master's "prayers" or "accompaniment". Among them, G. Adam seems to have demonstrated a range of behaviours, words and actions similar to those of T. Philippe.

However, one point of nuance should be emphasised. Unlike J. Vanier and T. Philippe, it seems that the use of intimate gestures and physical proximity with young women was particularly well known in the case of G. Adam. Testimonies from people caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship, but also from many members of the community who spent time with him doing various activities (working, on the mission, daily life, fraternal time, etc.) underlined his propensity to make intimate gestures towards young women (kisses, caresses) in public, including in a liturgical context (during Mass). Expressions of "discomfort", "incomprehension" and even "disgust" at these scenes were frequently heard in interviews with people who witnessed these scenes, without, it seems, this ever being translated at the time into words and actions intended to stop them. Similarly, strong signals of moral and spiritual control (daily confessions lasting an average of one hour with G. Adam involving several young women over several years) only elicited amused, understanding ("she is fragile"), or possibly questioning or mocking comments ("you can't possibly sin that much!"). The campaign of seduction through demonstrating great thoughtfulness, offering gifts and gestures of affection, which seems to be, as we have seen,

1. *Op. cit.* p. 99-100.

one of G. Adam's preferred methods of seduction, was thus visible to everyone in the community. In this context of spiritual and psychological control by G. Adam, and of the blindness of the L'Arche community around him, the repeated showering of attentive words, affectionate gestures and intimate contact in public may have resembled harassment¹, which for several young women developed into sexual assault. Pauline testified how G. Adam's seduction campaign led to a controlling situation in which sexual abuse became possible:

"As usual, he made me lie on him. He was lying on his bed and he made me rest on his heart for a long time while I talked about my life, my problems, it was the first time that it happened like that. [...] As I was saying, he had got into the habit of taking me on his lap, like a little girl, and I didn't realise that this was not supposed to happen. I had such confidence in him and it relaxed me, I who am so anxious by nature. Then one day he came up to me, put his lips to my mouth and kissed me. I was a very new house assistant, he had made me come round to his rooms for the first time at night, at around 9pm. [It was the eve of the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, a very significant Marian feast, and I, who loved the Virgin Mary so much, after what Father Gilbert Adam had told me, could only think that it was Mary who was leading us and that this union was God's will, and that it was therefore mystical. However, that day, at the time of the sexual act, I was for the first time very afraid, and I said to Father Gilbert Adam "I'm afraid! you're going to crush me!" and he immediately reassured me by telling me not to worry, that everything was going to be fine. I returned late to the house at 10.30-11pm. I started to experience a lot of anxiety afterwards and told Father Gilbert Adam and each time, the more anxiety I had, the more he tried to reassure me, to hug me tightly, to console me. I remember that throughout that whole year, I cried a lot in my prayer corner in my room, but I didn't know why I was crying like that. [At the beginning, the meetings were once a week on Sundays between 9 and 11 p.m. most of the time. But in the early years, Father Gilbert Adam would come back very late from his accompaniments and meetings. Sometimes it lasted until 11pm! It happened to me once, when I was working part-time in the workshop, it must have been a Thursday, in the middle of the week. Later on, the meetings were more like twice a week and this lasted for 10 years,

1. Sexual harassment is understood here as any form of imposed sexual or sexist remarks or behaviour directed at a person (whether recurrent or non-recurrent) with the actual or apparent purpose of engaging in a sexual act for the benefit of the perpetrator or a third party.

from 1996 to 2006. [...] At times, I came home at 1am and I was in a state of total physical exhaustion and could barely stand up in the workshops¹.”

The public display of a particular affection for young women did not, it seems, prevent G. Adam from being careful to keep secret a form of relationship which he was aware ran counter to ordinary societal and ecclesial norms, as Elodie confirms (“but he doesn’t give a damn about boundaries. He does it deliberately”). She describes the precautions he takes to avoid being caught in a compromising situation as follows:

“You couldn’t just enter his rooms how you wanted, there were some little things, little bells that warned him... When I had just started being accompanied by him, I thought it was strange, this system of alerts, of things that rang... when you entered his office, there were little birds that whistled, well, there were little alerts. It was an infrared system that detected if someone was there... Well, there were systems for passing from one side to the other. I certainly knew that I was not the first person with whom he did this. I knew that it had been practised².”

Moreover, the abusive relationships involving G. Adam seem to be distinguished from those of J. Vanier and T. Philippe by the practice of coitus, which according to the interviews, was due to the fact that there was no risk of unwanted pregnancy due to infertility.

Encouraging transgression?

Finally, interviews have shown that J. Vanier, T. Philippe and G. Adam encouraged other members of L’Arche to engage in affective-sexual-spiritual practices beyond their own circle. Women and men consulted them about the legitimacy of hidden (emotional and sexual) relationships they were having with a cleric or with a woman who had taken religious vows, i.e. about relationships that appeared to conflict with the conventional social and ecclesial norms to which they apparently subscribed. A single person, a member of L’Arche, recounts this discussion as follows:

1. Testimony cited, APP.
2. Interview 53.

“I had a relationship with a Jesuit [...]. And of course, you ask yourself, “What are you going to do about it? And with the normal issues that such a relationship brings! I talked to Jean about it and I talked to Gilbert about it. And their reactions were more than strange... And then I said to myself, “What’s going on here? I didn’t understand, but now I do. [...] I was relatively close to Jean. And especially, especially, to Gilbert. And when I told them this story, Jean’s reaction was to say... he was ecstatic. Yes, yes, he was absolutely ecstatic [laughs] and he said to me “but it’s so beautiful about you that the physical and the psychological always go together! And I thought [laughs]: “That’s the last thing I expected!”

She adds:

“As for Gilbert, he wanted to know everything about this Jesuit. It was like a recruitment interview – an interpretation I had later. At the time I found him intrusive and there was an excitement in him that I noticed but didn’t understand: was it his first relationship with a woman? Did you feel he was (sexually) experienced? Did I think I was the only one at that moment? How did I feel about him in his priesthood, weakened or strengthened by our relationship? I thought to myself: “well, he has specific questions...He must have a lot of experience! [...] He told me about prostitution in the temple, with an air of approval: “yes, yes, it does exist.” I felt at that moment that he was no longer talking about me, about us, that we were no longer talking about prostitution, but something else...”

This mention of prostitution in the temple echoes the biblical reference to the prophet Hosea and his ‘lost wife’ (he marries a holy prostitute) which will be analysed in the next chapter. The woman went on to say:

“I also talked about it with another priest and I noticed the difference in reaction. That’s when I started to distance myself from Gilbert.”

The acts and situations we have presented in this chapter reveal important differences between the three abusers. In particular, while strong words are used by women to express the violence and brutality of the sexual assaults and rapes committed by T. Philippe, this is not the case for G. Adam, nor for J. Vanier. In the case of J. Vanier, we note that several women mentioned intimate gestures of a sexual nature and touching (kissing on the lips, caressing), without mentioning a greater degree of sexual contact.

However, despite their diverse nature and levels of violence, the acts and situations we have described belong to the same set of experiences

that the perpetrators called “praying together”. J. Vanier himself, referring to his own initiatory experience with Jacqueline d’Halluin, described it in these same words: while they were “praying together”, they found themselves “in each other’s arms”. This relationship appears to have lasted for several days and represented, in his own words, “a summit in [his] spiritual life”, “a founding spiritual experience which was the source of his vocation, of his life choice”.¹

CHAPTER 16. Convincing

Antoine Mourges

“The Father never used violence with me. I always acted freely, at least externally, because internally I was bound by the fear of displeasing the Blessed Virgin by refusing, as he would always repeat to me, and also by a vow of obedience¹.”

These lines from the testimony of Madeleine Brunet, who reported T. Philippe’s actions in 1952, express a characteristic element of the hold that was exercised as part of this abuse system. It is not established through physical violence, but by the deployment of psychological coercion supported by theological, spiritual, affective and psychological arguments, as well as by the recourse to validation by peers. Here we will analyse these arguments employed by the abusers, based on their own words expressed in the documents at our disposal (correspondence and autobiographical accounts) or on those of people they have embroiled in these relationships. This corpus has one limitation: the analysis is based on the words of those who have broken with the system and ignores those who still remain in it by conviction. In this chapter, which deals with the beliefs of the group, this limitation weighs heavily, as it is undoubtedly the words of those who remain convinced today that would enable us to understand

1. Patrick Fontaine, “JV meeting; S. Posner; P. Fontaine on 2 June 2016 in Trosly”, AAI.

1. Testimony of M. Brunet, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

them better¹. These sources, produced over a period from 1952 to the present day, concern four people: J. Vanier, G. Adam, M.-D. and T. Philippe. This leads to the question of whether there is a continuity of arguments between them, but also over time. The answer to these questions will make it possible to measure the level of consistency and persistence of the arguments justifying this system and to know if each perpetrator of abuse appropriated it in the same way.

Justifying heterodox practices

In the system we are trying to understand here, the perpetrators of abuse adhere to mystical-sexual beliefs and practices, whose heterodox nature in relation to Catholic dogma inevitably raises questions and generally leads to reprobation. They themselves were aware of this, even before the 1956 sanctions were introduced. They knew that, in order to attract others to follow them, it would be necessary to explain these beliefs and convince them that they conformed to traditional doctrine.

Thus, the first type of argument is mystical and theological. We have seen that this deviance originated in the context of the Dehau-Philippe family and that Thomas Dehau was probably the initiator of it, but we have almost no information about how this came about. We do not know how he was able to justify his actions and initiate his nephews. The first justifications we know of are those developed by his nephew T. Philippe, who, given the perspective of this work centred on L'Arche, is the dominant model. In the chapter on L'Eau Vive, we have already set out the main arguments with which he sought to justify himself. Let us recall that for him these were "special graces", received in 1938 in Rome, through which he believed he had experienced a mystico-sexual union with the Virgin Mary, who had revealed to him a "secret", the exact content of which is unknown, but which seems to encompass the central argument of his belief: that

1. The Commission used various approaches to try to contact people who had expressed publicly or to third parties their support for the abusers, or even who had justified these practices, in the hope of hearing from those who now share these beliefs. Our attempts failed.

Jesus and Mary had had mystico-sexual relations with the aim of rehabilitating the flesh and inaugurating the mystico-amorous relations that would be lived in the Kingdom. Our approach here is not to present the whole of this belief system, nor to make a theological analysis of it¹, but to understand the way in which it was mobilised by the abusers to convince their victims.

Although there are numerous testimonies concerning T. Philippe, we will focus on three of them here because of their quality. Two dates from 1952 and the third from 2021 (relating to events in the 1970s and 1980s), which allows us to take stock of the situation at L'Eau Vive and then at L'Arche. The oldest are those from Madeleine Brunet and Madeleine Guérault. The latter is important, because she was the first to report what she had suffered between September 1950 and April 1951. Her strong temperament makes her testimony particularly interesting. She bitterly debates each of T. Philippe's arguments and pushes him to clarify them.

Even if they are not very frequent, let us indicate that the first elements she reports are references to the Old Testament, to tradition or to the work of Thomas Aquinas:

"He started theories, to try to convince me, those I have already reported: The lost woman of Hosea, the sacrifice of Abraham, the glorious mysteries, the transcendence of the prophetic mission (of his mission) in relation to the norms of morality²."

M. Brunet only mentions that he was referring "to St Thomas to explain that all these things were not a fault"³. In order to understand these arguments, they must be compared with a passage from a supplication that T. Philippe addressed to Pope John XXIII in January 1963. In it he writes about his attitude during his trial:

"I thought it my duty to take the only chance I had to defend those who had trusted in me, by showing that I had not acted under the impulse of passion,

1. On this we refer to the work of Father Thierry-Marie Hamonic (o.p.) regarding the theological aspects of T. Philippe's justifications, as well as to the report drawn up by the Frères de Saint Jean

2. Testimony of M. Guérault, 22 June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

3. Testimony of M. Brunet, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

or by virtue of a mistaken doctrine; as a private person, certainly not by virtue of my mandate from the Church, but as a private person consciously and deliberately assuming his responsibilities, because he sincerely believed in an exceptional will of God, which admittedly did not appear to him to be in harmony with the common doctrine of the Church, but which might not be absolutely impossible because of analogous examples in the Old Testament retained by St. Augustine and St. Thomas as always having value in speculative theology, not as a common teaching, but as an exception, that God absolutely reserves to Himself as the Author of nature itself, and as the very Motor of a new life according to the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, above nature itself¹.”

With this passage, we understand that by referring to biblical passages where God commands to kill (Abraham and Isaac), to marry a prostitute (Hosea and Gomer), T. Philippe seeks to demonstrate that sometimes God asks man to go against his commandments. Thomas Aquinas, following Augustine, explains that God, being the master of the commandments, can ask the opposite of what they dictate². T. Philip goes beyond and distorts their words and uses them to justify the moral exception of these ‘graces’. The latter are also based on the fact that these carnal relations would have existed between Jesus and his mother. This argument is in any case reported by M. Brunet:

“He always explained these facts as the outstanding graces of Our Lord who wanted to renew in his priest and his little wife the mystery of intimacy that had existed between Jesus and Mary. [...] He also implied that these relations had existed between Jesus and Mary³.”

On this point, the testimony of one of the sisters of the Carmel of Nogent-sur-Marne, already mentioned in Chapter 8, provides an additional element that sheds some light on the reference to the “glorious mysteries” mentioned by M. Guérout:

1. Supplique de T. Philippe au pape Jean XXIII, janvier 1963, III M 815, ADPF.

2. On the question of Abraham’s sacrifice see for example *Summa Theologica*, Prima pars, Question 100 “The moral precepts of the ancient law”, Article 8 “Do the precepts of the decalogue suffer dispensation? On that of Hosea see Secunda Pars, Question 154 “The parts of lust”, Article 2 “Is fornication a mortal sin?”

3. Testimony of M. Brunet, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

“Fr. Thomas wrote a dozen pages on the glorious mysteries that were given to Simone Leuret ~~after the apostolic visitation~~ [crossed out in the text] in 1953: the glorious bodies are compenetrated and there is physical intimacy between N.S. and the TSV, which could be started between us here below [sic]¹.”

The glorious mysteries are the fourth series of “mysteries” that are meditated on when reciting the rosary. There are five of them: the Resurrection, the Ascension, Pentecost, the Assumption and the Crowning of the Virgin. The passage, which is vague, suggests that for T. Philippe it is from the resurrection of Christ and probably after the ascension and the assumption that the establishment of a mystical and carnal bond between Jesus and Mary reaches its completion.

The reference to this relationship between Jesus and Mary is not expressed as clearly by M. Guérout. But she mentions that he “confided this famous secret to her” which she “did not want to repeat to anyone”. It is likely that she is referring directly to this relationship, which is clarified in another passage of her testimony. In it, T. Philippe argues that “through these mysteries (these caresses), his role was precisely to transubstantiate my body into that of the Holy Virgin.”. T. Philippe goes very far here, since he uses the term applied to the Eucharist (transubstantiation) to these sexual exchanges, which he thus tends to assimilate to a sacrament. But in this case, it is no longer inert matter (bread and wine) that changes substance, but the body itself, which changes into another body. It also seems that it is not the person who is transubstantiated, but only his or her body, as if the profound identity were not involved here. This element is so implausible that most of those who hear it find it difficult to consider it as an “argument”, even if T. Philippe and his followers remained attached to it. Another statement reported by M. Guérout reveals that he seeks to justify this incestuous model by asserting that “there was no line of demarcation between maternal love and conjugal love, that there was just love, which demanded total freedom”².

Further to this argument, the two women report others intended to further justify the mystical nature of these relationships. To M. Brunet,

1. Statement by R1, 19 February 1956, ACDF.

2. Testimony of M. Guérout, 22 June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

T. Philippe explains that “what for others would have been sin, was in this case a grace of purification, of love, of intimate union etc.”¹ On this point – crucial given the enormity of what is required – T. Philippe’s imagination seems limitless. It is probably with this in mind that we must understand another statement, which M. Guérault reports in a letter to Fr. Ducatillon:

“This other fact came back to me: “There is a negative virginity, the one I have vowed to God, and which is the subject of the vows of religion, and a positive virginity, the one that you acquire in this relationship with him”. Incidentally, I don’t really know what this means².”

Even if the obscure formula partly escapes us, you could think that this “positive virginity” is that which is attained in that state of grace above morality, where sexual acts are purified. Moreover, the Dominican also confided to her that “all this greatly honoured Our Lady and the Blessed Virgin Mary, because the sexual organs were the symbol of the greatest love much more than the Sacred Heart”³.

Let us now consider the public testimony, which has, since 2016, been given by Michèle-France Pesneau. We refer here to the detailed version she gave in her autobiographical book. Firstly, this is the way in which T. Philippe introduces the first sexual encounter he is about to have with her:

“He gravely explains to me that the parts of our bodies which we hide away most carefully, which he says is very good, will be the most glorified in heaven⁴.”

In a long passage a little further on, she provides the different justifications? that T. Philippe used for these “graces” during their relationship:

“I learned that this happened in Rome, when he was teaching at the Angelicum, [...] He used to go to a small chapel in the church of the Trinità dei Monti in front of a painting of the Virgin Mary. It was there that the Virgin Mary began to make him feel very intimate graces, similar, he said,

1. Testimony of M. Brunet, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

2. Letter from M. Guérault to Fr. Ducatillon, 31 March 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

3. Testimony of M. Guérault, *op. cit.*

4. M.-F. Pesneau, *op. cit.* p. 90.

to the mystical relations that she had here below, according to him, with her son Jesus. Father Thomas then, he told me, the grace to experience “a true wedding night” with her. He was still overwhelmed by it when he told me about it. These spiritual nuptials are also carnal, so much so that he tells me that he did not dare to surrender himself to them before consulting his Dominican uncle, Father Dehau, [...]. He decided, he told me, that unless Father Dehau was of a completely different view, he would surrender himself to “these graces”. Dehau said to him only: “Oh, with the Blessed Virgin, you know...”, adding that Father Thomas would surely experience considerable ordeals because of this. And in fact, Father Thomas told me, “that is what brought me my ordeals¹.”

We find here arguments which are identical to those reported 22 years earlier by M. Guérault and it is certain that M.-F. Pesneau could not have had access to them before the publication of her book. She also receives an “account of the origins” which corresponds to that given by T. Philippe in his *Pro-memoria* of 1956. In substance, there is a continuity of arguments between the early 1950s and her death in 1993. However, it should be noted that among the other victims of the 1970s and 1980s, the arguments are often brief. For example, Céline, a married woman and mother (the abuse began before her marriage), a member of L’Arche, who was abused in the 1970s and 1980s at La Ferme, mentions only the argument given at her “initiation”:

“He told me that these are very special mystical graces, that it is Jesus himself who is giving himself and that I am giving myself to Jesus². “

How can this apparent simplification be interpreted? Our hypothesis is that T. Philippe feels less need to convince in certain situations, or that it relates to each person’s own degree of willingness to go into the details of their traumatic experiences. In any case, it is difficult to deduce a change in the argumentation, which was taken up by his disciples after his death.

To our knowledge, Marie-Dominique Philippe does not appear to have abused people directly in the L’Arche space. However, we know from the case of M.-F. Pesneau that he may have had relations with a

1. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

2. Interview 104.

woman living at Trosly-Breuil at the same time as his brother. Basing ourselves on the work made public by the brothers of Saint-Jean, we note that M.-D. Philippe shared many of his brother's arguments, particularly those aimed at categorising these acts as "graces", enabling them to experience a sexuality that breached common morality. However, he does not seem to accept the argument of the relationship between Jesus and Mary. The work to analyse the texts and listen to the victims carried out by the Brothers of St. John did not identify this theme, which was so frequent in T. Philippe and his followers. One hypothesis (difficult to verify from our current knowledge) would be that this argument stems from the "revelations" received in 1938, which, in T. Philippe "increased" the corpus of beliefs that he and his brother apparently received from their uncle.

For their part, J. Vanier's arguments are clearly in continuity with those delivered by his master. Even if it was not addressed directly to one of his interlocutors, the account of his initiation with J. d'Halluin clearly indicates the recognition that she was reproducing the gestures received from T. Philippe, by affirming, for example, that "what was sought first and foremost was an experience of communion rather than a sexual experience, even if it led to it"¹. Here we find elements that are of continuum with T. Philippe, such as the desire to minimise the sexual nature of the acts in favour of the primacy of spiritual communion.

Let us now consider the mystical arguments that J. Vanier put forward to five of the women with whom he had this type of relationship. Four of them consider themselves victims and one, Brigitte, affirms that this relationship had a positive effect on her life, while gradually becoming aware of its abusive dimension. A first argument resolutely places J. Vanier in the wake of T. Philippe, since it consists in guaranteeing the sanctity and the rightness of these practices by connecting them to the latter's authority, as in the case of Brigitte with whom the relationship began at the end of the 1980s:

"But at that point I expressed that to him [questions about the nature of the relationship that was starting] and he said, 'Look, I understand the questions. You are absolutely right to ask them'. [...] he said to me 'Actually,

1. Meeting with J. Vanier on 5 July 2016, Report by P. Fontaine, AAI.

you should be reassured, ... what we are going through, what you are going through, is a little bit ... It reminds me of the relationship I had with Father Thomas. Yes'. And so he told me that and he said to me: 'You mustn't worry. It's true that it's the Lord who leads us and who leads you, and you must trust in him [...] yes. That was in the early 1950s and if you want, I'll tell you about it one day'¹."

The use of this argument is indicative of the weight that J. Vanier grants to his master and the credit that the latter could carry in the sphere of L'Arche. This argument is also used once in a less affirmative form with a woman to whom he has just delivered "mystical" arguments. He concludes the sequence by saying: "Otherwise it would call into question everything I have learned from Père Thomas"². Then he often employs the reference of Jesus and Mary. This reference is present explicitly in two of the five testimonies, and partially in two others. It is first reported by J. Farquharson:

"He said 'ce n'est pas nous, c'est Marie et Jésus. Tu es choisie, c'est spécial, c'est secret' (it is not about us, it is Mary and Jesus. You are the chosen one, this is very special, very secret). This was how he tried to convince me³."

While the argumentation is basically identical to that of T. Philippe, from whom it is derived, it is expressed a little differently with the formula "it's not us, it's Mary and Jesus". With J. Vanier, the affirmation is categorically stated and then returns, according to J. Farquharson, as a leitmotif to explain these practices. The term transubstantiation is not used. However, what he suggests here implies at least a form of mystical assimilation to the persons of Jesus and Mary that we have already observed in the Carmelite letters (Chapter 8). A similar argument is reported by Eva:

"On several occasions, I expressed my astonishment to him, saying that I did not understand how I could show my love to Jesus as a consecrated person, and to him. Each time he replied, 'But Jesus and I are not two, we are one' and 'it is Jesus who loves you through me'⁴."

1. Interview 2.

2. Interview 52.

3. Notes from J. Farquharson's oral testimony to GCPS in June 2019.

4. Eva's written testimony for GCPS.

J. Vanier does not assimilate his partner to Mary but positions himself as assimilated to Christ. He often repeated an expression inspired by the prologue of John's Gospel: "He loved this phrase: 'the Word became flesh so that the flesh might become Word', and he went a long way with this expression of what he said was the love of Jesus. The formula appears in a letter he sent to Brigitte on 3 May 1991: "Thank you for this text from Isaiah. The mystery of the Word which became flesh so that our flesh might become Word is a great mystery. Yes indeed, God is love"¹. While this expression is not found in T. Philippe, it would fit in well with his beliefs. The theme of assimilation to Jesus and Mary is therefore omnipresent in the 132 letters that J. Vanier addressed to Brigitte between 1987 and 2019. This corpus, which has already been extensively presented and analysed in Chapter 6, which is devoted to 'intimate correspondence', allows us to measure the central place of this belief for him. Mary is named 179 times, Jesus 517 times, and the theme of assimilation to Jesus and Mary is found regularly throughout the correspondence. Let us cite two examples. The first, at the beginning of the relationship (1987), describes this assimilation as a kind of ongoing spiritual process:

"Yes, I am happy to accompany you, to walk humbly with you, to pray with you, to carry with you everything that is heavy, painful, for Jesus. I am happy to be the witness of the love of Jesus in your life, to remind you of this profound call to become the heart of Mary, clasped by Jesus. But you too are called to carry me, to be Mary, to support me. [It would be good to write to me about the birth, the growth of this call of Jesus to become Mary²."

Similar statements were made four years later:

"O, how we must give thanks for this gift of his body. His body, temple of God, privileged instrument of the Holy Spirit, of the Father's Love. It is the gift of Jesus' body to Mary that transformed her, made her the Queen of the Universe, of Heaven, the figure of the Church, the Bride... Yes, my little beloved, we must thank Jesus and Mary for this gift of God. We must become so tiny, so humble in order to receive it. This week celebrates the body of Jesus, his sacred heart, and remains an important week for me³."

1. Letter from J. Vanier to Brigitte, 3 May 1991, APB.

2. Letter from J. Vanier to Brigitte, 2 September 1987, APB.

3. Letter from J. Vanier to Brigitte, 27 May 1991, APB.

The recipient does not know it, but the Feast of God, which J. Vanier calls "the feast of the body of Jesus", is for him the anniversary of his initiation. Finally, it is useful to recall that in a letter to Brigitte dated 3 June 2006, referring to the prostate operation he was about to undergo, J. Vanier described his genitals as "sacred" and spoke of them as "the sacrament of love". This point too is a continuation of his master, who sought to give a sacramental dimension to his mystico-sexual practices.

Finally, we turn to the arguments employed by G. Adam. Unsurprisingly, his is a mystical and theological argumentation similar to that of T. Philippe, who is also the ultimate reference for him. A clear affirmation of this can be found in the strange email he sent on 6 April 2013 to Pauline's parents, when she had just revealed to them that she had suffered abuse at his hands:

"I want you to know that I was accompanied by Père Thomas as a supervisor in the accompaniment of Pauline. If I did not understand and conduct this spiritual accompaniment correctly, I ask his forgiveness. If there has been an error, it is P. Thomas who should be blamed because he followed and guided everything. This man has suffered so much from the "coarseness" of the world before the beauty and richness of the mystery of Jesus and Mary in the Incarnation of the Word of God. It is a mystery of the inner self of which the world has no understanding. P. Thomas had to explain this himself, and it cost him dearly and he suffered terribly¹."

This message (with surrealistic overtones) was published in the Arte documentary of March 2019. We note that G. Adam claims that his "accompaniment" was entirely supervised by T. Philippe, who had died 3 years before the accompaniment started. Like J. Vanier, he gives T. Philippe as a guarantor, despite the implausibility of this. This email was sent two years before L'Arche published the results of the T. Philippe "second case". This explains why G. Adam, who denies the sexual dimension of the relationship, compares it to those relationships for which T. Philippe "suffered so much". With this statement, G. Adam openly claims his filiation. His approach was the same with Elodie. When asked by the Commission about whether he referred to T. Philippe as a source of his beliefs and practices ("did he refer to T. Philippe?"),

1. Email from G. Adam to Pauline's parents, 6 April 2013, APP.

she replied: “Yes, all the time. All the time. Père Thomas and all the others, Marie-Dominique, Père Dehau”¹.

In his letter to Pauline’s parents, the reference to the “mystery of Jesus and Mary in the incarnation of the Word of God” certainly refers to T. Philippe’s central argument, which he develops in private moments with Pauline:

“He told me that it came from God, that it was a gift from God to us, that it was unique, that it was “my secret with Mary”. [...] I was a little Mary whom God had chosen, that it was unique; a bit like a new incarnation². “

And with Elodie:

“It was, in fact, a little bit... As if he was God’s instrument for God to express his love for me. Like Mary with Jesus. I always said, “But why Mary with Jesus? [...] I didn’t understand. That was the idea. That there would be an affair between Mary and Jesus³.”

Following on from this central argument, G. Adam developed other, equally familiar ones:

“Elodie: It was mystical. For him, it was mystical.

Commission Member (CM): Right... Because it’s not marriage, we agree... This wasn’t a conjugal relationship?

E. No, because for him he was really a priest. And... he didn’t feel he was in sin at all, for him it was really... In accordance with his life as a priest. And it was... This famous secret, the order of the secret⁴...”

Like T. Philippe before him, he therefore defined these relationships as “mystical graces” which placed them above common morality. In his eyes, they do not belong to the realm of trivial and ordinary sexuality and are compatible with the priestly state. With Pauline, he also uses an argument similar to “positive virginity” argument: “He went so far as to tell me that God wanted to revirginize everything in me, through him of course”⁵.

1. Interview 53.

2. Testimony cited, APP.

3. Interview 53.

4. Interview with Elodie.

5. Pauline’s written testimony to the Officiality of the Archdiocese of Paris, 25 January 2014. APP

Priestly authority, love, guilt

Abusers do not only employ mystical and theological arguments to win over those caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship. They also make use of a range of authoritative arguments by which they hope to inspire obedience. Three in particular stand out.

The sacredness of the priestly state is an argument frequently put forward by T. Philippe or G. Adam in order to consolidate their hold. It should be stressed here that at its origin (Dominican priests from the Dehau-Philippe family working in cloistered contemplative monasteries), this system of beliefs and practices seems to be intended above all for priests and monks and nuns. The mystical and theological argumentation presented above is largely based on the sacramental dimension of the priestly function, as well as on the conception of the priest as an *alter Christus*. Both feed into forms of sacramental and vocational hold.

In the victims’ testimonies, arguments aimed at underlining the importance of the priestly function are recurrent. M. Brunet, describing the first advances that T. Philippe made to her, wrote: “He asked me to give myself up to him to give myself up to the priest” and adds:

“He wanted to renew in his priest and his little wife the mystery of intimacy that existed between Jesus and Mary. [...] “Our Lord, through his priest, wanted to sanctify and purify me”¹”

As for M.-F. Pesneau, she reports that at the moment when the sexual relations with T. Philippe began, the latter wrote to her: “You are the little victim of your priests, of their mass”.² In the case of G. Adam, to the women reporting an abusive or transgressive relationship, we have seen that he emphasised the meaning of these “graces” and their consistency with his priestly state. Pauline recounts:

“Father Gilbert Adam told me [word added illegible] that my vocation in L’Arche was prayer. He asked me to pray for his priesthood. Which I did for 10 years, I prayed the vocation prayer for priests every day³.”

1. Testimony of M. Brunet, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

2. M.-F. Pesneau, *op. cit.*, p.91.

3. Pauline, quoted testimony, APP.

Clearly, such an argument is not found in the testimonies concerning J. Vanier. One might even wonder whether his role in this belief system did not mark the starting point of a broadening out of these “graces” beyond their original environment. However, we have already seen that through his journey and his prophetic aura, he acquired over time the status of a quasi-priest. He can thus make proposals that pertain to the priestly function and act on them: accompaniment, vocational discernment, advice on celibacy, etc. His ambiguous status allows him to fully mobilise the argumentative register of T. Philippe.

The affective dimension occupies a central place in the system under study. We have seen that T. Philippe claimed that “there was no dividing line between maternal love and conjugal love, that there was just love, which demanded total freedom”.¹ This statement is essential for understanding the way in which the affective register is perceived and mobilised by abusers. They consider it in the same way as sexuality: supernaturalized, purified or ‘virginised’ by the graces they receive, which abolish the distinctions of common morality. They therefore believe that the affectivity they experience (associated with the sexual) surpasses the usual categories and somehow encompasses them all: filial, conjugal, friendly or affection, etc... All would be merged and superceded, becoming a supreme and divine love.

The first argument relating to this affective register aims at creating a sense of choice, convincing the Other that he or she has been chosen to receive special manifestations of divine love. However, in its expression, the argument of choice to divine love is often formulated in such a way that it can also be understood as an expression of personal love, opening the way to a confusion between God and the person declaring his or her love. This is found in all of our cases of abusers. M. Guérault writes that from the first meetings T. Philippe “said very inflammatory things about God’s love for me...” or again: “he tried persuasion, confidences, tenderness. He referred to me using the familiar pronoun *tu* [you] and called me his beloved”². Twenty years later, M.-F. Pesneau was told by M.-D. Philippe: “I love you more and more”. At the same time, she found

1. Testimony of M. Guérault, 22 June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

2. Testimony of M. Guérault, 22 June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

herself under the protection of the tutelary figure of the family pantheon: “You are Father Dehau’s little child, I am sure of it”¹. As for T. Philippe, she recalled this memory of her first meeting with him:

“He kept his arm around me and started breathing hard, murmuring: “My love, I love you... my love, I love you”².”

One can find similar words expressed orally or in writing by J. Vanier. We have seen that he himself received from T. Philippe a divine mission and the promise of exceptional mystical rewards. He is perhaps one of the few people for whom this promise seemed to be fulfilled, through the founding of L’Arche and an extraordinary life. One may even wonder whether it did not function in him as a self-fulfilling prophecy. This probably fed the conviction with which he asserted these same arguments to the women he seduced. We recall that he repeated to J. Farquharson: “You are chosen, it is special, it is secret”. As for Brigitte, he wrote to her in 1991:

“My little sister Brigitte, I was so moved by your two letters. So moved by the chaplain’s word [...], then by the word that Jesus gives you. That Jesus invites you into this mad confidence. He chooses you. He calls you for those graces of love that the world does not want to receive”³.”

Very similar expressions appear in Ivy’s diary: “He said he loves me and it’s communion. He gets something out of it. I give to him too. [...] He said he feels bonded to me. In Jesus”⁴. Further on she reports the following dialogue:

“He, smiling, said no it’s ok. I love you unconditionally. I can see there is more in you than this. More than fears and guilt [*sic*]. He calls me “Beloved” when he’s stroking me. It’s such a lovely word. Much better than darling or anything like that. And it means something good. In dictionary, beloved= much loved, a much-loved person”⁵.”

1. M.-F. Pesneau, *op. cit.*, p.67.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

3. Letter from J. Vanier to Brigitte, 1991, APB.

4. Excerpts from Ivy’s diary, Ivy’s Personal Archive (API).

5. Excerpts from Ivy’s diary, API.

We could quote many other passages of this type, to the point that one might wonder whether this importance accorded to the affective dimension (defined as a quest for mystical-love communion) does not reveal something of J. Vanier's personal manner of assimilating the beliefs and practices of T. Philippe. This is also in line with his more numerous references to the Song of Songs. Similar statements are made by his teacher, but to a lesser extent. This affective aspect also seems to be out of step with sexual practices which seem compulsive and unrestrained in T. Philippe, whereas for J. Vanier = they seem to assume a more discreet and moderate place. His were therefore perhaps more on a mystico-affective level than on a mystico-sexual level, although as he acknowledges when describing his initiation with J. d'Halluin, the former leads to the latter.

In the argument deployed by the perpetrators of the abuse, this emotional and divine choice cannot exist without a renunciation of reason presented as a spiritual battle to be waged against oneself. Often, this final argument intervenes like an accusation, when the person caught in the relationship questions, begins to doubt, and asks for explanations. This is particularly visible in the testimony of M. Guérout, whose resistance was strong. Therefore, when she argues with T. Philippe that her beliefs do not coincide with the dogmas of Catholicism, he does not hesitate to accuse her and to assert his superiority in a brutal relationship of domination: "he said that I had great pride, spirit, but that I had not studied theology, to dare to stand up to him like that"¹. The accusation of sinning through pride is found in the testimony of M. Brunet:

"He said that to refuse me would have been a great infidelity to grace, a lack of faith and humility (always giving as an example the faith of Abraham and the humility of Mary)²."

Accusing people of one of the capital sins is a way of arousing fear and guilt in them. The Dominican and those who emulated him used accusations essentially when employing 'mystical' and 'theological' arguments failed to convince. The antidote to this capital sin of pride is humility, its opposite in the register of virtues. Thus, 'littleness' becomes one of the

1. Testimony of M. Guérout, 22 June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

2. Testimony of M. Brunet, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

essential virtues of the members of the group. This demonstrates another characteristic of this belief system: its anti-intellectualism or rather a constantly repeated denunciation of the pride that theologians and philosophers would derive from their intelligence. The renunciation of reason thus becomes an essential condition of initiation. This is what T. Philippe states forcefully to M. Guérout, according to the latter:

"He explained to me that it was not for me to discriminate [between what is divine or not], that he was an instrument of God, and therefore was now directly being moved by God, and that it was therefore to God himself that I was refusing myself, through the barricade of my human intelligence."

This is also what M.-D. Philippe asks M.-F. Pesneau at the beginning of the relationship:

"As a requirement for the spiritual life, he imposes, a ban on thinking on me: 'Above all, you must not try to analyse', he says to me¹."

In both of these examples, abandoning intelligence goes hand in hand with a complete surrender to the will of the abuser who seeks to confirm his hold. In the case of J. Vanier, his use of the accusation of the sin of pride is not expressed as brutally as in the examples just cited. Rather, it is manifested between the lines, in a deductive way, as in the passage from the 1991 letter to Brigitte quoted above, where he speaks of "those graces of love which the world does not want to receive"².

Closing the circle

The intention of the final set of arguments we have identified is to isolate the person who is subject to the hold by arguing, on the one hand, that "the world" cannot understand these graces, and that, as a consequence one must look elsewhere, to people named by the abuser to serve as guarantees of what they were experiencing.

A first argument in this register takes the form of an injunction to silence by invoking the secrecy that naturally surrounds these graces that "the world does not want to receive" and cannot understand. It is found

1. M.-F. Pesneau, *op. cit.* p.72.

2. Letter from J. Vanier to Brigitte, 1991, APB.

with varying degrees of intensity and clarity amongst all the perpetrators of abuse and is already clearly expressed in the 1952 testimonies:

“He had supremely recommended that I never speak of this to anyone, not even to Father M-Do my director, because he was not up to the task of understanding such mysteries¹.”

We can see that T. Philippe even tries to hide from his brother, who nevertheless supports his actions with the woman in question. This reserve on the part of T. Philippe is probably due to the latter's reproaches of imprudence that he made to him, as well as to his lack of support for the ‘revelations’ of 1938². We also note the strong insistence with which T. Philippe demands secrecy and silence:

“He told me that I should be prepared to die rather than reveal such mysteries to anyone, even in confession and at the point of death. And he wanted to bind me by promise, which I did not want³.”

The same injunction is reported twenty years later by Céline in the Trosly-Breuil environment: “Father Thomas often told me not to talk about it to anyone, for he said they would not understand me⁴...”. The same insistence is found in the case of M.-D. Philippe with M.-F. Pesneau: “He repeated to me that, if I had any doubts, I should speak to him “first and only to him”⁵ As for G. Adam, Elodie explains the way his approach as follows:

“That is, it's something that the general public cannot hear about, who would be... That is... morally right but that could not be understood. So there was this story of pearls and the swine, ‘You don't cast pearls before the swine⁶.’”

J. Vanier made similar statements, which we have already quoted above (“It is very special, very secret”; “that the world does not want to hear”).

The systemic dimension is particularly visible when perpetrators intervene directly on behalf of each other, in order to reinforce the hold

1. Testimony of M. Guérout, 22 June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

2. On the subtle nuances that distinguish the two brothers and their networks, see what has been discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 9.

3. Testimony of M. Guérout, 22 June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

4. Interview 104.

5. M.-F. Pesneau, *op. cit.* p. 70.

6. Interview 53.

on their respective victims or try to prevent them from speaking out. Sometimes, as we have seen, it is also a question of ‘sharing’ the victims. We can thus observe that the system operated through the human network of which it was composed.

We will now set out characteristic situations involving different abusers, starting with M.-D. Philippe. The testimonies concerning his interactions with his brother's victims are in many ways emblematic. The oldest, which is also one of the most detailed, is that of M. Guérout who is guided by M.-D. Philippe and arrives at L'Eau Vive on his advice. After the first assaults by T. Philippe, it was understandable that she would wish to turn to her spiritual referent. But as he was travelling in North America at the time, she turned to a Dominican from Le Saulchoir, Fr Bonduelle, a first cousin of the Philippe family. Bonduelle made an initial intervention with his cousin, who confessed to making one error. According to M. Guérout, Father Bonduelle's line of conduct was “wise, firm and precise”. But when M.-D. Philippe returned, she confided in him the acts she was being subjected to and their justifications. Convinced that these practices were unhealthy, she wanted to “correct” T. Philippe, with the support of his brother. But his brother adopted an ambiguous attitude:

“On his return, Father Marie-Do [...] completely unravelled Bonduelle's prohibitions, questioning the degree to which these things were not charismatic. He accepted that I should pray over the heart of Father Thomas, as the latter had repeatedly requested, and even over his bare chest, but not in the usual way. In addition, he said that the priest could have a misaligned sensitivity, that he needed maternal tenderness, and that I should give it to him, because otherwise he would seek it from others, with whom it could go wrong.”

He urged his charge to continue on this path and to prolong this type of relationship, in turn highlighting his brother's emotional fragility, but also a possible ‘charismatic’ origin to these acts, which cautiously opens the way to a validation on his part. The testimony gives the impression that he would discover these practices and their justifications. In fact, the question is not completely clear-cut. We saw in Chapter 9 that in February 1957 he was condemned by the Holy Office not only for having “covered up” for his brother, but also because of faults in spiritual direction and a

suspicion that he had carried out similar acts of which he was accused. Forty years later, in the early 1990s, he played a similar role as guarantor and defender of his brother to Joseph. The latter, having learned of the abuse suffered by his wife Céline at La Ferme came to him¹ :

“A little angry, he told me: ‘you are not in the conscience of Father Thomas’. Then he told me about Shem and Japheth who covered Noah’s nakedness by walking backwards so as not to see his nakedness. (Gen 9:23) [...] He also told me that after the marriage he should not have done so. The idea that Father Marie Do wanted to pass on to me was that there are things that we cannot understand, and that we should not judge Father Thomas’ intentions².”

As we can see, the arguments have evolved little in 40 years and the Dominican acts with the same duplicity here. However, his complicity went further than this defensive role, because we know that he had mystico-sexual relationships with two women at the same time as his brother. We have observed that these “shared” relationships also involved J. Vanier with J. d’Halluin or J. Farquharson. We are also aware of several situations where the priest and his disciple acted as guarantors for their respective conquests, who were obviously unaware that the person they approached was in fact an accomplice. On this, Héléne reports in her testimony that although J. Vanier had “encouraged her to respect the priest” and to “not say anything which could shock him”, she had been to see T. Philippe who “was quite evasive in his answer, saying that perhaps J. Vanier needed that!!” Many years later, Céline and Joseph, after going to complain to M-D. Philippe (the consequences of which we know), turned to J. Vanier:

“He seemed surprised that I had come all these miles to talk to him about it. He didn’t deny things but seemed to have doubts about the sexual aspect of the case. When I asked him if that was why Father was convicted in ‘56, he said he thought it was, and he also said, “that the wonderful Jacqueline must have gone through that kind of thing too³.”

1. Céline reports: “Father Marie Dominique was close to my husband’s family in Fribourg. My husband was present at the birth of the St John’s community in Fribourg [...] He frequented the small community a little by following the teachings of Father Marie Dominique and by confiding in Father Philippe Mossu.”

2. Interview 104.

3. Interview 104.

During this meeting, which took place in 2011, the founder of L’Arche maintained a reserved but not necessarily cautious attitude, since he went so far as to give J. d’Halluin as an example, probably because he knew that she was a positive reference for the couple.

The next two testimonies, those of women reporting an abusive relationship with G. Adam, show that over time and due to the power his status as founder gave him, J. Vanier in turn becomes a guarantor and a reference point in this abuse system. Pauline, the first, states:

“One day when I was in anguish again, he even went so far as to tell me ‘if you want, we can go and see Jean Vanier and talk to him, he will understand very well’. So I was reassured again¹.”

However, this suggestion was not followed up on. This was not the case with Elodie, to whom the priest makes the same proposal, which she accepted. Before presenting her description of this interview, it is worthwhile resituating what G. Adam had previously said to her about J. Vanier’s position in this belief system.

“Commission Member (CM): How did he position himself in relation to Jean Vanier in this panorama [the mystico-sexual belief system]? Did he see himself as a co-disciple? Would there have been a master or two, Father Thomas and Marie-Do, and then there would be a whole group of disciples? Or was it more... I don’t know, how did he see it?

Elodie (E): I... I can’t say clearly enough. I mean... I never saw them together. So I only had Gilbert’s version. I know that Gilbert was accompanying Jean and [anonymous woman] in their relationship. [...]

MC: In their relationship which was of the same nature, was it clearly expressed? And he accompanied them?

E: It was implicit, but for me it was clear. Yes, it was.

MC: And he accompanied them?

E: Yes, that was explicit.”

It is interesting to note that G. Adam chooses to draw a parallel between the relationship he has with Elodie, and the one that he suggests exists between a woman and J. Vanier. The parallel appears

1. Testimony cited, APP.

sufficiently credible for him to propose that Elodie have a discussion with J. Vanier about her doubts concerning their own “relationship”. Elodie did indeed meet J. Vanier:

“Jean said, “Actually, I can’t speak for you... Actually, you ask for pledges but I can’t say for you because you are free in fact. And if you want my word, you won’t be free. I’ll tell you that it’s good, or that it’s not good, but it won’t be you¹.”

J. Vanier therefore refused to express an opinion. He stressed his desire not to influence the young woman and to respect her freedom of conscience. The position might seem wise; Elodie also points out that at the time she found that “It was not bad, it was understandable...”. However, it is obvious that J. Vanier could not in any way be unaware of G. Adam’s adherence to T. Philippe’s practices and beliefs. His silence therefore appears to be a sign of caution and a way of letting the relationship continue. Finally, how can we fail to notice that he remains silent on the relationship of a young woman with a priest, who is old enough to be her father? Elodie later sensed this and wrote several years later in a letter to J. Vanier:

“A great deal of anger has arisen in me. I understand the hold I have been under and the sexual abuse I have suffered. [...] I must confess that some of this anger is directed at you. [...] One day, when I could no longer cope with the inner conflict I was experiencing, he suggested I meet you. [...] And that’s how I came to see you in your office to talk about this relationship with Gilbert. And you listened to me without showing any surprise and without helping me to free myself from this crazy relationship either. I was completely under Gilbert’s control and your role should have been to help me realise this, to report this relationship and to stop Gilbert. Instead, you sent me back to my freedom...it was up to me... I don’t understand your attitude in this case. For me, it was then a kind of legitimisation from you. Jean Vanier supports this... Of course I was an adult, but so vulnerable... Gilbert being a ‘father’, I listened to him. What is more, Jean had given his consent... I think that you were complicit².”

The letter was written some months before J. Vanier’s death, when his health was precarious. However, he formulates a response (probably

1. Interview 53.

2. Letter from Elodie to J. Vanier, 19 February 2019, APE.

with the help of third parties) in which he uses the same strategy of avoidance and denial that he has since 2015:

“Indeed, you asked if you can give your trust to Father Gilbert. I asked you, does he do you any good, does he bring you closer to God? You never revealed to me your deep questions about the intimacy you experienced with him on a relational level. I am sad that you seek to blame me for what you call sexual abuse¹.”

While he acknowledges that he remembers the meeting, he says that she had not informed him of her questions about the “intimacy” she was experiencing with G. Adam. He carefully avoids talking about a “sexual relationship” and leaves Elodie responsible for her accusation of sexual abuse – “what you call it” – again refraining from expressing an opinion.

1. Letter from J. Vanier to Elodie, 5 March 2019, APE.

CHAPTER 17. **Consenting?**

Claire Vincent-Mory

How do the women and men invited to these practices respond to the abusers' advances, their gestures, but also the legitimising discourses associated with them? How do we understand the arguments? Do we appropriate them? Finally, how does one experience the ordeal and negotiate with the feeling of incomprehension, contradictions, the impression of living a secret or, for some, a "double life"? Based on the subjective perception of people who consider themselves to be 'survivors', 'victims' of abusive practices, or simply partners in a transgressive relationship, in a relationship that is outside ordinary social and religious norms, this chapter looks at the difficult question of consent. Indeed, difficult as it may be, this question is crucial for our analysis: sociological research in particular has shown that its frequent exclusion in ecclesial or institutional 'scripts' automatically generates a 'blind spot' in the understanding, by rendering the victims invisible¹.

From a human and social sciences perspective, consent is a difficult spectrum to grasp², which should not be confused with either giving in³, nor with sexual desire. The philosopher Geneviève Fraisse, echoing

1. Constance Lalo, Josselin Tricou, " Si cet homme...*op. cit.*, p. 77.

2. Geneviève Fraisse, *Du consentement*, Paris, Seuil, 2007

3. Nicole-Claude Mathieu, "Quand céder n'est pas consentir. Des déterminants matériels et psychiques de la conscience dominée des femmes, et de quelques-unes de leurs interprétations en ethnologie" in Nicole-Claude Mathieu (dir.), *L'arraisonnement des femmes. Essais en anthropologie des sexes*, Paris, EHESS, 1985, p. 69-245.

Paul Foulquié, defines consent as follows: “the act by which someone gives to a decision initiated by another the necessary adherence to proceed to its execution”¹. However, nothing is less clear than the precise definition of this act of adherence:

“The spectrum of consent extends from its explicit verbal enunciation (‘yes’) to a whole range of physical behaviours, making its interpretation malleable. For consent is above all a relational practice, which becomes individual when the need for a ‘free and informed’ statement arises”².”

Indeed, while consent can sometimes be understood in its legal sense, i.e. in its formal and contractual form, it can only be approached, in the cases studied by our report, in its “procedural and interactionist dimension”³ i.e. through the empirical analysis of interaction situations established through the material collected from the people who have experienced these situations. Despite being convinced of its relevance, this approach added complexity to the Commission’s work⁴.

1. Geneviève Fraisse, *Du consentement*, op. cit., p.22. Geneviève Fraisse has defined three conditions for establishing consent: that it be free and not forced (“the ‘yes’ always oscillates between choice and constraint”); that it be “enlightened” (“individuals must have detailed and prior knowledge of the proposal for which they must give their agreement or disagreement, and it is up to the initiator of the contract to reveal the components of the proposed act”); that it be “stated” (“that is to say, manifested or expressed in such a way as to leave no room for doubt”)

2. Alexia Boucherie, *Du désir partagé au viol : ouvrir la boîte noire des relations sexuelles*, Paris, Editions François Bourin, 2019, p.16.

3. Florent Coste, Paul Costey and Lucie Tangy, “Consentir : domination, consentement et déni”, *Tracés. Revue de Sciences humaines* [On line], 14,2008, online since 26 January 2009, accessed le 25 July 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/traces/3655>

4. The reasons for complexity are manifold. First of all, although the questions facing the Study Commission are primarily concerned with *sexual* consent, it is important to remember not only that this experience of consent actually concerns many broader areas, but also that its implementation in the field of sexuality cannot be dissociated from the social and political structure in which it is embedded. In other words, if consent is defined as a non-constrained act of commitment to an action, it also presupposes “the equality of the partners and [the equality] of the social conditions of possibility of this choice” (legal, marital, civic, economic, cultural). Are they present in the situations we have examined? As Alexandre Jaunait and Frédérique Matonti have explained, the question of consent is directly linked to that of authority in general and the exercise thereof, both on an ethical and anthropological level, but also on a political level. In this sense, the analyses in the third part of the report support the argument developed here. Alexandre Jaunait, Frédérique Matonti, “L’enjeu du consentement”, *Raisons politiques*, 2012, vol.2, n°46, p.6-7.

“I was afraid of going crazy¹” The loss of reference points

“I didn’t know if it was right or wrong. After the first time, I was totally lost [...] even afterwards I had difficulty distinguishing whether it was right or wrong, whether it was part of the accompaniment: being chosen, elected by Jesus: John was substituting himself for Jesus. [...] In spite of everything, he continued to accompany me. He had a hold over me. At the same time, he also did me good².”

Listening to the reasons why women and men acknowledge that they were caught up in these abusive situations cannot be done without first measuring the importance of the internal debates they went through. Indeed, with the exception of a few cases that we will look at later, confusion, incomprehension and even distress seem to have dominated, as illustrated by the following extracts from the diary written by a woman during the period of time she was in this type of situation with J. Vanier:

“I don’t understand.
I feel angry with him – putting me in such a position.
I can’t think clearly. I feel very confused and I want to hide away.
I feel awful. [...]
Why is he doing this?
Does he really think it’ll help??
Touching so intimately
Yet nothing has “really” happened. It’s all been quite harmless. But it has evoked feelings in me I don’t think are appropriate with him!
I want, yet I don’t want. [...]
After all there should be a “non-sexual” “toucher”. But this feels sexual.
Am I mis-interpreting? Am I going to hurt him? Am I putting too much emphasis on that?
What to do??
Pray, Pray, Pray [...]
What I don’t like is mixing prayer/hug
How God loves/how he loves...
It’s making things I feel are not Godly into things “spiritual”.
I can’t offer up a hug as a prayer. I’m not praying. I’m trying to respond to him. Trying to please him.
What to do?? [...]

1. Interview 53.

2. Notes from Corine’s oral testimony to GCPS, 12 July 2019.

It sounds strange but I see people as either blood relations or friends or lovers or professional roles, and I categorise my relationships with others. WHO ARE YOU?

Or maybe I'm wrong to ask such a question. Maybe I'm now learning about openness to the spirit.

You hear all these stories of priests and women who get too close... and everyone condemns it. Why is our proximity ok?¹ ”

To varying degrees, those who told us their stories asked themselves similar questions. Is it right? Is it wrong? What is the real nature of this form of relationship, which is unlike anything else I have experienced? How can it be classified?

“This is embarrassing, but like, I was so naïve... That night in Paris with Jean, I didn't sleep all night and I remember thinking, “Well what does this mean? Is he going to marry me?” Like I'm just from this little, small town and you don't have sex until you're married. “And so, what does this mean? He's, I think he's celibate like I” [laughs]. But then it was like, no, it's just... we just carried on as usual after. So, it wasn't any of what I thought and I was like completely, didn't know what was going on. Trying to put it into my framework and it didn't fit².”

For some people, the feeling of confusion was complete and plunges them into deep disarray. In this situation of loss of bearings, what is it that carries away the apparent consent?

“My confidence in him is total³”

Regardless of who the abuser is, all the stories of people caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship speak of the power of trust in them. If you give in, if you respond to the signals you have perceived, or if you refrain from saying “no”, it is first of all because you believe that the words, the actions, the intentions of the abuser are good, in spite of the feeling of confusion, the level of misunderstanding and the feeling of unease. As we have seen, one of the common features of these women is that they were spiritually directed or accompanied by the

1. Excerpts from Ivy's diary, API.

2. Interview 92.

3. M.-F. Pesneau, *op. cit.* p. 71.

abuser and had developed what many refer to in *retrospect* as a ‘blind trust’ or a ‘hold’ relationship. One woman humorously points out: “part of me thought he did have a direct line to God”.¹

This is the case of the victims or survivors in positions of responsibility, who subscribe to the authority relationship described in the Chapter which looks at the founder's relationships of authority, and who are used to J. Vanier having “the last word”² on various subjects: personal, professional, or spiritual. However, it can also be observed in the testimonies of women of a different profile, for whom the relationship with the abuser was previously built on an experience of salvation. In a moment of existential distress, during a depressive episode, or in the face of a personal tragedy, the abuser had been perceived as the “saviour”³, “the one who ‘heals’ and has ‘saved my life’⁴”:

“He's “midwife” for me as I am brought to life. [...]

JV's physical gift is insupportable for me – it feels confusing and dangerous, yet I don't stop him because his motives are good. The last thing he wants is to hurt me.

“I can't imagine what I'd do without you”, I said to him.

But his desire is to set me free, give me life, and for that the umbilical cord must be cut.

Hang on – he said he was the midwife⁵.”

These short diary extracts testify to a conviction shared by almost everyone at the time of the incident that the abuser can do no wrong. His presence, his love, his support, his listening seem indispensable for life, leaving a glimpse of the relationship of dependence and control. The conviction is reinforced by the victims' certainty of his superior capacity for compassion and intimate understanding of their personal suffering⁶, better than their own.

1. Interview, 90.

2. Interview 92.

3. *Op. cit.*, p.69.

4. Interview 53.

5. Ivy's diary.

6. *Ibid.*

As we saw in the first part of this chapter, forms of a cross-linked hold, particularly a vocational and sacred hold (in the case of T. Philippe or G. Adam, priests of the Catholic Church), were progressively put in place from the seduction phase onwards:

“For me, at that time, I saw the priest, by virtue of his ordination and the grace he received, as the representative of God. As I said, I knew very little about priests and had had very little opportunity to meet them. I had a very high and lofty idea of them. For me, they were- and could only be because of their total consecration to God- blameless and holy people. I did not even ask myself the question and I [...] could not imagine for a single second that a priest would want to abuse me, whether consciously or unconsciously!¹”

In some cases, the hold of the abuser-priest seems total, as the following testimony shows:

“We had a Eucharist afterwards [in a retreat for first year L'Arche assistants], which he presided over, and I remember that as I approached him to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, I began to feel pain all over my body and I wondered what was happening to me. And then, even stranger, when I received Jesus's host from these hands, I looked up and thought I saw the eyes of the merciful Jesus on me, and I saw an immense love? Moreover, what I thought I saw was not his eyes, those of Father Gilbert Adam, but blue eyes, and when I realised much later that Father Gilbert Adam did not have blue eyes, it confused me even more! What was that? [...] I had seen, ... for the first time, an image of the merciful Jesus during a night of prayer and Adoration at Montmartre, with the ... of St Thérèse of Lisieux, before I entered L'Arche. [...] My last two psychiatrists told me that he certainly had a hypnotic look at that moment².”

Whether the abuser was a priest or not, the investigation has revealed how this absolute confidence in the words, actions and intentions of the abuser were reinforced each time by the apparent aura of sanctity of this person in the L'Arche communities, among Catholics and even – in the case of J. Vanier – in the public and media space. How then can one believe that this could be destructive?

1. Testimony cited, APP.

2. Testimony cited, APP.

The accounts of blind trust also reveal other elements of discourse, which are illuminating in understanding how victims accepted these mystico-sexual practices.

“Who was I to oppose such a conviction?¹”

The belief in the superiority of the abuser operates in two complementary ways. First, it promotes the gratifying feeling of having been chosen, elected for a unique relational experience with an exceptional man:

“he is a very busy man and I'm lucky to see him at all... but I love him so much... [...] It's a unique position, as far as I'm aware...”

Secondly, it is accompanied by the conviction of an asymmetric position, a feeling of inferiority that prevents the person caught in an abusive or transgressive relationship from questioning the sexual touching as well as the language used to justify it. For some, the relationship is intimidating, and the individual is afraid to displease him if they openly express fears, misunderstandings and doubts:

“ I didn't want to disappoint him. But, but I couldn't do it. So, I just kind of stayed in this limbo. But meanwhile, things were continuing with Jean at that level².”

In the same vein, other women expressed concern that they would appear childish or boring to J. Vanier if they expressed their fears or their continued state of inner turmoil. In some cases, the fear of displeasing is associated with the fear of being abandoned by the perpetrator of the abuse, as the diary entry quoted above showed, for example³.

1. Eva's written testimony for GCPS, 2019.

2. Interview 90.

3. Ivy's diary.

Thirdly, the belief in the superiority of the abuser sometimes contributed to the view that it was legitimate for his expectations and needs to take precedence over those of the abused person. Several women expressed that they had intended to serve this exceptional man without burdening him with additional worries (he doesn't need a plateful of problems¹) and to "please him"²:

"I remember, once when I had not seen him for a long time, being aware, as he was kneeling in front of me, that I had to force myself a little in front of this man, who was so much older than me, to cuddle him, to cajole him, but the impression passed quickly³..."

Some acts thus seem to fall under this 'altruistic relationship', according to which 'women feel sorry for the man or guilty for saying no'⁴. They agree to "please" and respond, without wanting to, to the desire of the one soliciting, without necessarily feeling sexual desire, or without expecting the man to care about them – let alone their sexual pleasure. Some women testified that they felt "used". While acknowledging that Vanier was deemed exceptional, placing them in a subordinate position, several women expressed satisfaction (even gratitude) at having had the privilege of alleviating what they identified as the great man's suffering and loneliness, and at having been able to contribute to fulfilling his 'need for affection', as the following excerpt shows:

"I often had the impression that there was no place where he could share what he was going through and that, in the end, he was a very lonely person. He had few people he could tell [...] it weighed on him to an unbelievable extent, because he was always being invaded by people who wanted to put him on a pedestal, to glorify him, people who were sticking to his heels because they were there to touch the saint who passed by, it weighed on him enormously. And he was defending himself. And I was not at all in that relationship with him. I never put John on a pedestal. I refuse to believe or say that he was my idol. I was well aware that his vocation was not mine and that we did not have the same things to live for... [...]"

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. Interview 52.

4. Kelly, *op. cit.*, p.19.

That doesn't take anything away from the fact that he is, he was a man like all of us, with a need to be loved, recognised, confirmed and, and a thirst for affection, a need for love in fact you see. From the moment he lives as a bachelor, he is no less in [hesitation] need, in expectation, in thirst of affection, of tenderness, of faithfulness. And I think that's something that made me [hesitation] consider John not as a being apart, an alien who lives on planets where he is idolised, but as a human being like us, who needs to find a unity in his life and who needs to find places where he can be himself, you know. And maybe that's why I, I finally welcomed these... this need for a privileged relationship, for affection given, received¹."

The feeling of having been chosen to access a hidden facet of the great man's humanity, to play a unique and privileged role of 'care' (which, in the words of some victims was ambiguously related to maternal care, consolation, affection, sexual service, etc.) seems to have encouraged their acceptance of mystico-sexual practices. Moreover, this extract shows how there is only one step between protecting the great man to protecting the privileged relationship that unites them to him, and that this is sometimes crossed.

"The idea of betraying God poisoned me completely"

Convinced of the charisma – or even the holiness – of the abuser, all the people expressed their conviction that the abuser is "God's representative", or at least the mediator of God's will for them. This is particularly visible in the stories of women for whom the religious vocation, the spiritual quest and the desire to respond to a divine call are intimately linked to the abusive experience:

"Because in fact what I experienced with him... It was like a call, in fact. Ultimately that was how he presented it to me and how I understood it when I adhered³."

Accepting the abuser's actions may have been, for some, a way of trying to deepen their spiritual life⁴. Many were convinced by the rhetoric

1. Interview 2.

2. Pauline, quoted testimony, APP.

3. Interview 53.

4. Interview 90.

of justification and have sincerely believed that they were the chosen recipients of a 'divine secret'. Obedience to a supposed divine will is used as a major argument for fabricating consent, as testified, for example, by the case of Madeleine Brunet, who stated that she felt internally "bound by the fear of displeasing the Blessed Virgin" and by a "vow of obedience", in an excerpt quoted at the beginning of the previous section. From this perspective, the turmoil and discomfort felt was perceived by the victims not as a warning signal, but as proof of their lack of faith. All their attention was then focused on remedying this through prayer, conversion, faith in the abuser and in the divine. J. Farquharson, a 'survivor' of an abusive relationship with J. Vanier, puts it this way:

"It all seemed very sexual, not spiritual to me, I was young, naive, I was confused. I couldn't understand that it was not us but rather Jesus and Mary who were doing these sexual things but I didn't admit that to him. Rather, I thought the problem was with me, that I did not have the right spirituality and therefore did not understand the importance of what was happening¹. [...] This is how I felt: unworthy of this special relationship. Not understanding or believing that I was "chosen", "special" and not able to say it to anyone left me feeling "not good enough" and that feeling stayed with me for many years. [...] but I felt I was not spiritual enough to understand this gift that I was given. And I, I lived with that. I just wasn't... I wasn't holy enough. I mean, they're telling me, we'll get to the words later, but "this is a special gift. You're chosen. This is, you know". Yeah. Yeah, it's yeah, all the other stuff. "A lot of people in the world wouldn't understand, so, you can't talk about it, but it's... you're chosen blah blah blah". And I never felt... I just always felt inadequate because I didn't get it²."

This feeling strongly echoes those, for example, of the victims of T. Philippe, of whose testimonies we have already quoted several extracts in the previous section. Ultimately, it is an internal debate of the same kind that we observe in Elodie's words:

"When I thought "I have to stop, we have to stop", often these were moments when I was not at peace. And when I was at peace, I was in prayer and all that, I went to mass, I managed to pray. And there I was with him in my heart, you see. It's complicated to explain this to you but, you see, it was in fact

1. Notes issues du témoignage oral de J. Farquharson auprès de GCPS, juin 2019.

2. Interview 90.

unified in me. Actually, when I was with him happily, or in thought, or involved in physical acts, and I was in peace, I was united with God, that was this story of discernment. And then, there was "*The angel of darkness turns into light*", that's what. It was complicated. And... no, it's true that Ignatius... But at the L'Arche, there's a... a history for that. But there... it was extreme. It was very advanced. In the sense that we read the spiritual exercises, we were into all that. [...] Yes, we read Saint Ignatius, you see¹."

Elodie refers here to the Ignatian method of discerning spirits, which G. Adam used, twisting it somewhat, since all of Elodie's anxieties and questions about her relationship with him were described by him as a spiritual battle to be fought, traps of the devil.

At both ends of the spectrum: liberating or destructive experience

As we said in the introduction to the chapter, the situations of the people caught up in mystical-sexual relationships are very broad. Several years, sometimes several decades after the end of the abuse, the people who agreed to talk to us are *looking back* on their experience.

Firstly, several people caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship have testified that they consented, that is to say to their agreement to the experience, and even, in the case of some, to the belief underpinning it. J. Vanier himself, in several interviews with members of L'Arche in 2016, expressed his consent and his belief in the fruits of the mystical-sexual relationship with J. d'Halluin. Like him, other people have in turn testified of their conviction that they were introduced to a form of liberating relationship, a source of spiritual and personal fulfilment, as Brigitte testifies:

"He has never shown the slightest attitude of pressure, violence or malice towards me... [...] I would even say that the relationship I experienced with Jean was a relationship that opened up to [hesitation] how to explain? To a greater freedom in relation to myself and in relation to my deepest identity, and it is a free relationship that I have never [silence]suffered from in the first place, from which I see no negative effects, and which has allowed me to... to become an adult in faith. [...] I never felt that this relationship was manipulative. On the contrary, I had the impression that it gave me great

1. Interview 53.

freedom to be myself... to have the energy or the strength to make the connection between my faith and daily life, to bear the responsibilities that I assumed and finally the fruits of this... of this affection, this benevolence, this trust, I never questioned them. I am telling you things as they are. [...]

I feel that I was free in this relationship. That's what prevents me from considering myself a victim. [...] If you like, as long as I'm concerned about the truth [...] And as long as I'm concerned about transparency, I can only say what I live and what I feel [...] Well, it's all very well for me to torture myself by saying that I'm a victim who doesn't know it, that I'm in the hold, but without knowing it, that I'm in denial [...] That doesn't work. I don't have any particular mission entrusted to me here, but I suffer from seeing Jean massacred without there being another little voice saying something... which I thought was right and consistent with his writings, his public life... and consistent with my faith. I don't care if Père Thomas wrote unacceptable things about Mary. [...] It's obvious that it's not acceptable, and that it's not right on a theological level. I am well aware of this, but in my experience with Jean, I have never experienced repercussions from it. So, is this avoiding the issue? [hesitation] But you see, I can't do it; there's something in me that [hesitation] can't accept that I'm avoiding the issue¹."

As a Catholic, married and a mother, this woman adheres to the transgressive belief that this was a form of 'chaste sexuality', outside the ordinary social and religious norms, and a legitimate form of love:

"I have never found myself in a situation of [silence] or double life, or infidelity. [...] I have wondered about this from time to time, I have questioned myself, but I have tended to look at the fruits and the strength of fidelity that I have found in... Again, not in the dimension of tenderness, but in the conviction and in the... of course tenderness, we all need it and it was gratifying to be... to feel loved by Jean, but only, it's not... It's not this borderline relationship, if you like, which [hesitation] was negative for my relationship²."

The statement indicates a partial appropriation of the corpus of beliefs, rather than an adherence to the whole. This woman describes her relationship with J. Vanier as an experience of 'welcoming a deep, unexpected love, firmly anchored in Trinitarian love', basically

1. Interview 2.
2. Interview 2.

accepting the intertwining of the affective, spiritual and sexual spheres, while at the same time claiming never to have paid attention to J. Vanier's frequent references to the relationship between Jesus and Mary (see the analyses of his letters to Brigitte in Chapters 5 and 16):

"He [Jean Vanier] never substituted himself or passed on. No, I think he is, [silence] how can I put it? I think he saw this relationship as being a little bit the... something that happens at the heart of the Trinity, but this is our Christian call to each person, [hesitation] which has this ultimate goal, which is to feel welcomed into the love of God, within the mystery of the Trinity. From there to being taken for, to passing oneself off as Jesus or believing oneself to be Mary? No. But it's within the mystery of the Trinity which, for me, is much more [hesitation] right or important³"

We would point out that recently this person expressed, after the interview we have just mentioned, that she would no longer enter into a relationship of this nature, and that she now perceives the abusive dimension of this relationship. Beyond this case, for others, the temporary adhesion and appropriation of elements of the mystico-sexual beliefs may have been facilitated by the feeling that they were positioning themselves within a familiar extension of the spirituality experienced in L'Arche:

"I think his [Jean Vanier's] answer had to do with touch, the body. And as he had often talked about baths, or washing the feet, or the touch of people with a disability, and as I had read it many times in his books, it didn't seem very strange to me²."

At the other end of the spectrum, several women analyse and recharacterize their apparent consent as an abdication of critical thinking. In relation to the abuses committed by the Philippe brothers, one woman remarked: "he put my conscience to sleep³. M.-F. Pesneau describes this abdication of the critical spirit as follows:

1. Interview 2.
2. Interview 52.
3. Testimony of M. Brunet, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

“My capacity for reasoning is silenced in the face of this religious man who once told me that I should ‘above all, not try to analyse’ what is happening in my spiritual life, of which he had already taken control, associating abuse of spiritual power with sexual abuse¹.”

For her part, Eva, a consecrated laywoman who was caught up in an abusive relationship with J. Vanier for several years, writes:

“I had to see, I saw, how much my actions and his went against my virginal gift to Christ...This is where I see a hold, like a fascination in fact. I no longer had a critical capacity vis-à-vis these acts and this secret love. Fascination because I was very attracted and yet felt ‘strange’².”

The Commission’s enquiry has revealed that this second category of *a posteriori* reclassification, which testifies to a distancing and a way out of the loss of reference points, is made not only by people for whom the temporal distance with the abuse is the greatest, but also by people who chose to be accompanied, psychologically and sometimes also spiritually, to find a way out of the many psychological, emotional, spiritual and sexual consequences that such abuse caused.

On both sides of the spectrum, several women in retrospect say that they regret the intimate gestures with Vanier and the confusion in which they were placed for a time, but that they were not overwhelmed or permanently affected. They refuse to be identified as “victims”:

“So, the thing is. You know, I mean, coming into this thing, I don’t call myself a victim. But I do feel deeply betrayed on the level of friendship and on the level of vocation, because what Jean was living was not celibacy. You know. And yet he was encouraging celibacy in people in L’Arche, so there’s a real sense of betrayal there. I mean, celibacy is really clearly defined as no genital activity, and what he was doing was, you know...³”

For these women, the suffering caused by the feeling of betrayal, both on a friendship and professional level, would be their dominant feeling today. We would stress that this position, which – for lack of a better term – we will call “intermediate”, was not found among the

1. M.-F. Pesneau, *op. cit.* p.69.

2. Interview 52.

3. Interview 92.

victims of T. Philippe, nor among those who consider themselves victims of G. Adam whom the Commission was able to meet.

CONCLUSION

Exposing the reasons for apparent acceptance or explicit non-rejection of abuse, from the point of view of those who were subjected to them, brings us – once again – face to face with this “grey area”, which the women and men in question do not all call “sexual violence”, nor do they consider them to be “fully desired relationships”.¹ Did these women and men therefore consent?

According to this chapter, the question of consent for people caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship appears to be limited, represents a trap for the victims and all-too convenient for the perpetrators (to paraphrase Sandrine Ricci)². Indeed, the notion of consent implicitly assumes that they can make a free and responsible choice – which is generally not the case, as this chapter has shown. In so doing, it tends to shift the question of responsibility onto the victims, ignoring – or even negating – the question of the oppressor’s responsibility, suggesting in passing that without their collaboration, the abuse could not have occurred³. Furthermore, focusing on the issue of consent may run the risk of obscuring the plurality of power relations that do play a role. If the focus is placed primarily on sexual gestures and acts, the testimonies clearly show that they are a dramatic dimension of a broader problem, marked in particular by multi-faceted controlling relationships and undeniable relationships of domination.

1. For the social science literature, “these ‘grey areas’ testify to the persistence of a heteronormative order that leads us to think of current sexual practices as ‘liberated’, ‘revolutionised’, and within which the only possible violence would be that of rape (Boucherie, 2019, *op. cit.* p.22). However, the social reality – the situations we are analysing are proof of this – is much more complex.

2. Sandrine Ricci, “Céder n’est pas consentir” : apports de Nicole-Claude Mathieu à une pensée critique du consentement des femmes à l’oppression”, in Dominique Bourque and Johanne Coulombe (dir.), *Nicole-Claude Mathieu (1937-2014). Penser “l’arraisonnement des femmes”*, vivre en résistance, Les Éditions sans fin, 2017, p.180.

3. Nicole-Claude Mathieu, *L’arraisonnement des femmes...op. cit.*, p.237

In addition, the accounts of the people who agreed to share their painful story allow us to observe forms of internalisation (acceptance) of the norms, judgements, expectations and representations of gender relations of the different groups to which they belong: the community group in L'Arche, the community of religious affiliation, the society in which they live. For people caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship, their self-awareness has, for a period of their lives, passed through the gaze of J. Vanier, T. Philippe or G. Adam: "constructed in subordination, [their "I"] does not find its value and its *raison d'être* in itself, but in the gaze of the man, particularly the one who embodies many facets of authority¹. Self-awareness is also constructed in the eyes of brothers and friends and members of the community.

How to escape from these abusive relationships and configurations of power?

CHAPTER 18. Undoing the hold

Antoine Mourges

Following on with the examination of how the various personal histories that the Commission has heard about developed, this chapter considers the moment when the abusive set-up is defeated, and where the fundamental imbalance on which it is based is turned against those who maintain it. We will present the different expressions of refusal, as well as the stages to disengage from the system, for those who consider themselves as 'victims' or 'survivors'. The process of escape implies the restoration of the link with the outside world and generally, through the confrontation with an otherness that they had hitherto been trying to avoid, leads to the unmasking of the system of abuse. What are the attitudes, on this path of exit and what roles are played by third parties?

The time of the exit from the hold

For people caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship, whether or not they declare themselves to be victims or survivors, how long does the hold last? Is it possible to identify the moment when the controlling relationship is truly over? When does the situation of hold open up to a process of escaping? Where is the threshold, the tipping point at which the dynamics of emancipation prevail over those of alienation? Leaving it to the disciplines of psychology, psychiatry or psychoanalysis to provide answers to these crucial questions, here we

1. Sandrine Ricchi "Céder n'est pas consentir... *op cit.*, p. 175

mobilise the tools of the human and social sciences in an attempt to better understand the markers, the language and the social and historical conditions of enabling the processes of disengagement.

Indeed, our enquiry has revealed a significant diversity in the duration of abusive or transgressive relationships. Among those we observed, some seem to have lasted only a few weeks, while others appear to have lasted for entire adult lives. This is the case of those who, from being victims, became in turn perpetrators of abuse, such as J. Vanier and Jacqueline d'Halluin, and seem to have based their entire existence¹ on the beliefs that justify the system. If we consider only the duration of sexual abuses, those by T. Philippe lasted in some cases for 8 months (M. Guérout), 18 months (Cecilia), 2 years (M. Brunet), 8 years (Céline) or 14 years (M.-F. Pesneau – but 24 with M.-D. Philippe). In the case of J. Vanier, the abusive relationship with 2 women spans a period of a few years (about 2 to 5 years), while other women mention a period of one or more decades. For G. Adam, the relationships described by Pauline and Elodie lasted from a few years to a decade.

This diversity in the length of abuse has to do with the process and forms of the holding relationship that have already been presented. The dozens of cases studied seem to indicate that the more dimensions of life in which the hold relationship is exercised (spiritual, psychological, professional dimensions, etc.), the longer the process of disengagement takes. A lot of social characteristics and psycho-social and psycho-affective factors are at play: age, experience at the time of entering the relationship, preservation of social ties outside the system to a greater or lesser extent, clerical Catholic culture received in childhood or not, etc.... some of which are largely outside the historian's or sociologist's field of competence (such as the psycho-affective set-up, for example). The case of M.-F. Pesneau illustrates this well: after being under the influence of M.-D. Philippe since 1974, she says that she began to become aware of the problematic and harmful nature of what she was experiencing in 1991 and only put a definitive end to her relationship

1. This is also the case for a certain number of women and men who have been drawn into the hold of one of them or of the Philippe brothers and who are still unable to break free. These situations, which we felt necessary to mention, are outside the scope of the analysis we are carrying out here and mark the limit.

with him in 1998. She spoke for the first time to a third party in 2007, before a combination of circumstances and her own personal work of liberation enabled her to speak to the leaders of L'Arche in 2014, and then to a wider public from 2016 onwards. In her case, the process of disengagement took almost as long as the abusive relationship.

Comparing the different cases, it is possible to identify similar moments or stages, such as the awareness (of being abused and under a hold), the cessation of the sexual relationship, the decision to analyse it in order to understand the reasons that led to being caught up in it, the end of the secrecy and the restoration of social links, the distancing from the abuser, the restoration of self-esteem.... These moments are not chronological and are sometimes experienced in the same period; in some cases, it seems that certain steps may have been experienced, but others not... The distinction is heuristic. However, we would emphasise that the moment of the first refusal of sexual acts occupies a special place in the process of disengagement. As we have seen, the hold is not to be reduced to sexuality (and vice versa), and this extends equally to emotional, spiritual and social levels. The hold can extend beyond the cessation of sexual acts, as it seems to have been the case for Pauline. In her testimony, she reports that after stopping the sexual acts, she remained under the hold of G. Adam for several years. Conversely, we have seen that for M.-F. Pesneau, the process of disengagement began well before she stopped having sexual relations with M.-D. Philippe. However, the fact remains that the sexual dimension of the relationship is generally the aspect where the relationship of domination is most strongly exercised. It does not seem possible, in view of the situations that were entrusted to us, to escape the hold without bringing an end to the acts of sexual abuse, in particular because it is a strong symbolic act of self-expression on the part of the persons caught in an abusive or transgressive relationship.

BECOMING AWARE OF AND BRINGING AN END TO SEXUAL ABUSE

The moment of becoming aware of the abuse is a crucial stage in all the trajectories that were confided in us. Beyond their heterogeneous nature and circumstances, they have in common to have struck the mind of the person concerned. The accounts allow us to identify three main scenarios.

The first type of situation could be described as a saturation effect or breaking point. The women concerned say that they took the initiative to break up, at a time when they no longer felt able to live in a relationship that was causing suffering, a feeling of 'chaos', duplicity or 'collapse'. Madeleine Brunet said: "It was I who walked away"¹. For her part, Madeleine Guérout said that she refused the sexual abuse once she had lost all hope of convincing T. Philippe of his error and all hope of being able to provide M.-D. Philippe with evidence that would convince him. This same process can be observed in the accounts of women caught up in a relationship with J. Vanier. Thus Héléne states:

"Then I didn't feel comfortable in the confines of this form of relationship and I then said that it didn't make sense to me and that this form of relationship between marriage and celibacy was going nowhere"².

This extract reveals J. Vanier's failure to convince her of the validity of this too-special relationship. Some of them testify to a threshold of unbearable suffering: "The fact that I felt like an object, and the incoherence of my 'double' life that I could no longer bear"³. In another passage, this same person specifies that she experienced a feeling of reification:

"When we went quite far, as settled between us, I had this feeling of becoming an object because he spoke little in these times, he showed his love. And it was taking me several days to get over it internally"⁴.

Similar situations are present in the two testimonies concerning the abuse committed by G. Adam, but with complementary parameters. Pauline links the interruption of the sexual abuse to a context of precariousness and professional malaise, a strong feeling of isolation in the community and the confrontation with the incomprehension of her new leaders at La Ferme when it was taken over by J. Vanier and O. Ceyrac (see Chapter 13). Pauline's place, attached to G. Adam and the former assistants, was called into question. Socially isolated, and caught up in several conflicts, she reached a breaking point at this time that led her

1. Testimony of M. Brunet, June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

2. Interview 51.

3. Interview 52.

4. Eva's written testimony to GCPS, 2019.

to take action. Again with G. Adam, Elodie also expresses the feeling of having reached a breaking point at a certain time, which led her to seek out J. Vanier for advice, insight and support: "I was going a bit crazy. I was afraid of going crazy anyway.. I was obsessed with this thing"¹. This fuelled frequent arguments with G. Adam and led her to seek the help of a psychotherapist, with G. Adam's financial support, until she decided to break off the relationship.

We then note a second type of moment of awareness, characterised by the intervention of an outside person who calls out to the person in the hold, at the moment when the latter opens up verbally about what he or she is experiencing (including in few euphemistic words). Thus for example, Cecilia, back with her family in California for a holiday, sees a friend again who had also – without the first one knowing it – suffered a sexual assault by T. Philippe, which she had firmly rejected. This is her account of the encounter:

"So in '80 I meet Donna again and she asks me about it and ... I get all ... all purple when she says, "Do you pray in the nude? And then ... she was the one who said, "But it's not from God!" And I think that immediately I knew that she was right and immediately I ... I took the plane and I went back home and I never went back to see Père Thomas for spiritual guidance"² ..."

With the help of a few incisive words, D. Maronde Varnau, who had confronted T. Philippe a few years earlier, confronts Cecilia with the reality of the situation. A similar event occurs with Judy Farquharson. While she was at La Ferme discerning whether to make a long-term commitment to India and seeking help for the sexual abuse by J. Vanier, she was sexually abused by T. Philippe. A Jesuit friend, Gary Mooney, comes to visit her in Trosly:

"I think that's when I told Gary, I just indicated not a lot of details, but that, kind of what was going on. And he said, "this is crazy. You've got to get out of here". [He was a Jesuit from Canada, from Toronto, who was doing his doctorate at Cambridge and who knew about L'Arche]. [...] I don't know if I said anything to Pere Thomas, no I didn't, but with Jean "I just have to go home". I didn't say "this is it, I'm finished with L'Arche,"

1. Interview 53.

2. Interview 11.

just, “I have to go home” Because by then, because things had started with Pere Thomas, that’s what put me over the edge. I just thought: ““Well there’s nowhere to turn”¹.”

The nature of the intervention is similar to the previous one: the friend’s words are categorical – ‘this is crazy’, directive – ‘you have to get out of there’ and provoked a reaction in J. Farquharson. In other cases, the intervention of the third party could place and have an effect without the victim even having spoken, as for example with M.-F. Pesneau. The trigger is a discussion with Anne – the pseudonym she gives to Jeanne Riandey. The latter came one day in 1991 to ask for her help. Marie-France will take care of her until her death in 1996. We have presented her previous trajectory in Chapter 7. In 1991, according to M.-F. Pesneau, she was then elderly and had an alcohol addiction. As their friendship deepened, J. Riandey opened up to M.-F. Pesneau and ended up telling her what she had suffered at the hands of the Philippe brothers:

“After telling me this, Anne is visibly relieved. [I’m not ready to ‘talk’ then, and I don’t say anything. I just listen to her without making any comments. She tells me that Père Thomas does the same thing with a number of young women at La Ferme. “You see what you have escaped from,” she says. I haven’t escaped anything at all, but for the moment I am still unable to “speak”. However, this revelation marks the beginning of a process of liberation from Père Thomas for me².”

For M.-F. Pesneau, J. Riandey’s confession is like a mirror held up to her own experience which she is beginning to examine. It would take her another seven years to say “no” to M.-D. Philippe for good.

The accounts provided to the Commission reveal a third case. The moment of realisation may arise from a disagreement between the abuser and the person in control. Ivy describes this moment as follows:

“It was quite a decisive moment in terms of my relationship with Jean, because I, by then, was getting older and had decided I would have children on my own. And I told him that, so I shared with him the fact that I was, and I have. I have two children that I had through IVF. And his reaction was. [silence] Really. [silence] He was displeased with me. He. [silence] It

1. Interview 90.

2. M.-F. Pesneau, *op. cit.* p. 152.

was a coldness, and it was effectively a rejection of what I was saying, he didn’t agree with what I was doing. And even though I had. And even though when I had the children, I was still kind of in favor of what L’Arche is doing, I haven’t been back to Trosly¹.”

The young woman’s feeling of having disappointed the man for who she had immense admiration, and of now being misunderstood by him, provoked the beginning of a process of disengagement and brought a halt to the encounters involving intimate gestures, personal accompaniment and prayer.

Obstacles and supports on the difficult road to disengage

Once awareness has been reached, the person then has the opportunity to engage in the process of withdrawal. The testimonies we got show how slow and difficult this process is. Two examples illustrate these difficulties. In an email to Eileen Glass (then vice-coordinator of L’Arche International) in January 2016, a woman describes the process she is going through as follows:

“To be honest, it has been a very slow process of allowing my feelings to come alive. I only now realize how depressed I have been over the last 6 months, all I knew was that I was having bigger sleep problems than I have ever had...My waking up has been a gradual process, but when finally named – really just a few weeks ago, a realization that it has a lot to do with P. Thomas, and once my denial was acknowledged a terrifying shame as well as liberation. Now nights of my body convulsing in tears, though the feelings are not fully there. Where to go now? I obviously need to talk to someone, but who? and I also feel I need to speak to JV who is implicated, but how and when? And at the same time whom of my friends to be honest with, so ashamed of my blindness, my vulnerability of which I had so little awareness, and yet it is unbearable to pretend to be someone I’m not²...”

We emphasise that at this point she does not yet report to the international leaders that she has experienced an abusive relationship with J. Vanier. This excerpt is a perfect example of the difficulties and

1. Interview 45.

2. Email from a woman to Eileen Glass, 16 January 2016, quoted in the L’Arche International Crisis Unit logbook.

suffering that people who engage in the process of disengagement can go through: the slowness of the process, anxiety, crying spells, insomnia, the shame of having been led astray, preventing them from confiding easily in their loved ones... As for Elodie, she shares her feelings of anger, and her inability to take a stand:

“I mean, what you hear in what I’ve said, maybe I’m still in it actually...In the sense that I’m actually very angry at Gilbert for ending up in this situation and going through this trouble. I mean, not knowing what’s good and what’s not good. I struggle to feel like a victim¹.“

While recognising the harmfulness of the situation, she testifies to the difficulty of placing a moral cursor, to define and name, and denounce a deleterious experience.

Other difficulties arise from the confrontation with the abusers and their supporters. A friend of Pauline’s, then a member of La Ferme and close to G. Adam, wrote to her accusing her of denying God by writing to the bishop about the abuse she had suffered. She urged her to back off and return to G. Adam. The case of M. Guérout, several decades earlier, showed similar difficulties. In her attempt to denounce what she and others were experiencing at L’Eau Vive, she came up against M.-D. Philippe who was protecting his brother:

“M-Do came (end of Lent 1951). In confession, I gave him the crudeness of the details not heard in Fribourg. I released him from the sacramental secrecy, so that he could talk about it with P.T. He saw his brother, and left for Bouvines without seeing me again, and I had the feeling that he was running away. [...] When he returned from the Easter holidays, he went back to the E.V. – It was then that he said to me: “Say that the experience is negative for you, that it does not give you God. But don’t presume for others: take care of your own conscience, not that of the P.T. or of others”. [...] Then he left me abruptly, and angrily, saying: “If you have the power to make a canonical visit, do it yourself; as for me, I do not judge!” (my break with him virtually began at that moment, Easter 1951)².”

For many, the process of leaving the relationship of control and abuse is also a process of breaking with the circle of trust, whether it be friendly,

1. Interview 53.

2. Testimony of M. Guérout, 22 June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

fraternal or professional: it often condemns the women and men to undergo an additional punishment of being side-lined and isolation.

Secondly, the difficulty may arise from the man’s refusal to let the relationship end. While she has expressed her wish to stop intimate gestures and sexual intercourse, Pauline reports that she was subject to G. Adam’s insistence:

“In the Sacristy, he wanted to continue kissing me, I did not want to. He held me by my [illegible word] by the hand. It was impossible to free myself from his power at [illegible word], overbearing, abusive but in a very subtle way, making you do what you don’t want to do under the guise of mysticism. To the end he tried to hold me back. So did Renate by saying “are you sure you want to go? I had no hope left and [?] in L’Arche or in La Ferme.”

Over the next six years (between the cessation of the sexual acts and her departure from Trosly-Breuil for a religious community) she did not manage to speak out and remained tragically imprisoned with G. Adam:

“Fr. Gilbert Adam didn’t know what to do with me, or how to accompany me. He continued to shake my hand very tightly, but it was all over since 2006 and little by little I was finally going to get him to stop kissing me. He didn’t know what to say to me: “You have to pray”, “You have to pray” [...] I had enormous [illegible word] and I was getting worse and worse. When I called him for help on the phone, “What do I do now?”, Fr Gilbert increasingly hung up on me¹.”

In the case of J. Vanier, the situation seems to be different. None of the women reported any pressure or verbal or physical harassment. It seems that in each case he simply accepted the person’s decision, as Hélène testifies for example:

“his response was: “yes, but that does us good”. “He seemed not to understand how this form of relationship could pose a question for me and despite my questioning did not seem to want to try to understand. I then said that I did not wish to interrupt this relationship completely, but that it should remain on a level of friendship: this he immediately accepted without any spiritual blackmail or pressure of any kind².”

1. Pauline, Testimony quoted, APP.

2. Interview 51.

J. Vanier's lack of understanding of her arguments echoes his response to J. Farquharson in 2001, when she came to meet him in Toronto to tell him of the harm he had done to her: "I'm sorry that you experience it like that"¹. We can hypothesise that this type of response is a sign of J. Vanier's entrapment in the abuse system and his inability to consider and empathise with the harm that may have occurred. A rather similar situation is described by Eva:

"I decided to stop, but I felt how attracted I was, how drawn, how fascinated I was when I was in his presence. And I told myself that I wouldn't be able to talk to him about it and find the arguments, that I would succumb to his charm. So I decided to write. I did it the first time, but circumstances meant that we met again before I got his reply, in which he told me that he respected me and that, if I wanted him to, he would of course agree to my request. It was in this reply that he told me of his passionate love for me which, in any case, whatever my decision, would continue. As I therefore saw him again and he did not tell me that he had written and what he had written, we continued... Some time later I wrote to him again, firmly resolved this time to put an end to these amorous manifestations for good, as the situation was becoming unacceptable to me as a consecrated one, while respecting him infinitely and loving him²."

The difficulty here is not Vanier's resistance, but the asymmetry of the relationship and her fascination in him, which makes it difficult both to engage in face-to-face dialogue and to maintain her decision once and for all. The presentation of these different types of difficulties shows the complexity of the process of disengagement. Once again, it reveals how important it is to be able to confide in a sympathetic third party in order to escape from an isolating secret. Depending on the case, these external third parties may occupy a wide variety of positions and functions: friend, spouse, relative, spiritual guide, psychologist, victim support association and victim sharing groups, researchers in the human and social sciences, or journalists...

Although psychology professionals – psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts – are regularly mentioned, this

1. She reports this in her first testimony to the international leaders of L'Arche on 5 May 2016, AAI.

2. Eva's written testimony to GCPS, 2019.

does not seem to be the case before the 1970s, due to the still limited diffusion of this speciality and the mistrust it still aroused in Catholic circles. M. Guérout or M. Brunet seem to have found support by confiding in each other, and by turning to other priests and people in the Church. For the most recent situations, this tended to become the norm. This is the case of M.-F. Pesneau, who reports that she first consulted a psychiatrist at the beginning of 2015 and then started psychotherapy at the end of that year. It is the same for J. Farquharson: therapy allowed her to understand what she experienced and to rebuild herself. And for her, this passage through psychotherapy goes further since she made it her profession. We find a similar pathway in D. Maronde Varnau, who used psychotherapy to rebuild herself after spending two years in L'Arche and who is now a psychotherapist¹. This recourse to psychotherapy is also found in the two women who report an abusive relationship with G. Adam.

In a similar vein, victim support associations have played an important role in the process of disentanglement for some of the people we met. They offer discussion groups and publish testimonies and resources that can help other victims to reflect on their experiences. However, only M.-F. Pesneau stated that she regularly attended one. The particular role played by AVREF should be highlighted. The association was founded in 1998 by families of members of the Saint-Jean family who had been victims of abuse. This association played an important role in allowing the first publication of the testimonies of three women victims

1. In her testimony posted online by AVREF, she analyses her experience in L'Arche through her experience as a therapist: "I am a psychotherapist and I practice body-centred psychotherapy. After undergoing this 'baptism of fire', I understood better how healing psychological wounds is as important as prayer in the spiritual life. I realised that Père Thomas Philippe had a highly developed spirituality, but at the same time he suffered from a serious and untreated psychological illness (a compulsive sexual addiction) that was harmful not only to himself but also to others. Curing compulsive sexual addiction requires specific psychological knowledge and methodology. What Père Thomas was doing was completely contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But it is no use saying that Father Thomas' actions were rooted in "sin", or that Thomas Philip was a "sinner". The origin of compulsive sexual addiction is often a result of early childhood trauma. Today, thanks to the ability to raise the awareness of the Church and the religious world to sexual compulsion, help and mercy are possible for the predators, as well as the victims

of T. Philippe in 2016. Although they did not have recourse to victims' associations, some of the women we met sometimes reproduced the principle by creating links of solidarity and mutual aid between themselves. A good example of this is the meeting on 4 October 2015 between four victims of T. Philippe, described by M.-F. Pesneau¹. In Trosly-Breuil, several of the victims also found important support from some members of L'Arche, in a community that struggles to hear the victims' voices and to become aware of the system of abuse that it sheltered. Among them is Jean de La Selle, a member of the Trosly community since 1972.

In addition, the importance of listening and family support should be mentioned. Several cases recounted to the Commission showed that the initiatives of family members to report to persons in authority or to tell the truth publicly were decisive.

Finally, a last element in the process of understanding the hold should be mentioned. The subject is nowadays in the public domain and media and is also receiving a renewed interest from the human and social sciences. In her testimony on the AVREF website, under the pseudonym of "Cynthia", Cecilia underlines the role of Isabelle de Gaulmyn's book, *Histoire d'un silence*, in making her aware of the limits of the help that the institution can provide and in helping her to take the step of testifying publicly. On another note, the master's thesis by A. Mourges, which has been circulating since 2009, was mentioned by several victims as a tool that enabled them to learn about the first elements of T. Philippe's abuse at L'Eau Vive.

Reporting the abusive relationship

At the end of this chapter, we would like to consider the victims reporting on this system of abuse, of what they went through. They spoke out to those in charge of the institutions where this system was developed: L'Arche and the Catholic Church. To date, no complaints have been made to the French or Canadian judicial authorities (etc.), since, according to the people the Commission met, they did not feel ready to come forward publicly before the perpetrators of the abuse

1. M.-F. Pesneau, *op. cit.* p. 175-178.

were dead. Thus proceedings against the majority of them are now time-barred. It will be seen that only the case of G. Adam led to the opening of an investigation¹. Generally speaking, the victims did so confidentially. But some of them, judging the institutional response to be insufficient or feeling the need to help other victims, have chosen to share their testimony publicly. Considering these reports necessarily leads us to question the way in which the leaders and members of L'Arche have received them.

These individual trajectories of disengagement have a collective and institutional dimension. First of all, as we have seen, individual voices have an effect on other victims. They contribute to the creation of a collective awareness of the existence of common and repeated abuse strategies, but also, to a certain extent, to the formation of a collective identity of 'victims' or 'survivors' of J. Vanier and/or T. Philippe. Several women who recognise themselves as victims meet in a discussion group to share their experiences and support each other. Two women who had been abused supported a third woman by writing a letter to the leadership of L'Arche International to testify and ask for reparations. Secondly, these individual trajectories of disengagement are part of a collective process of transformation of the way the founders and the institution itself are viewed. This is particularly true for members of the institution who have experienced an intense, sometimes fusal, relationship of authority with a figure in the L'Arche pantheon (first and foremost J. Vanier). For them, lifting the veil on the part of the lies, things left unsaid, but also on the mechanisms of collective blindness is both painful and a source of a feeling of betrayal.

To close this chapter, we have chosen to chronologically present the successive reports that are milestones in the formation of a process of collective disengagement. If we focus on the period 2013-2020 and on the reports received by L'Arche leaders, we emphasise that these were generally received and dealt with jointly with ecclesial institutions.

Even if it has become obvious by the end of this chapter, it is important to recall the difficulties of speaking out, because of the weight of shame and guilt, but also because of the fear of appearing disloyal to

1. This investigation was closed without follow-up.

L'Arche and its founders. It is also and above all because of the fear of not being believed, given the aura of the founders and priests of L'Arche. In fact, before 2014, several of them were confronted with a first unfortunate experience of speaking out. Corinne's testimony is a good example:

"In 2010, I was in a silent retreat, and all of a sudden, these facts, these images resurfaced, I spoke about it to the priest of the retreat, he answered that it was not good, but gave no other reaction, no support, advice, reaction. Six months later, I decided to write to JV to say that what he had done to me was unbearable and still is today. I couldn't say these things and I wanted to make sure that he read this letter, so I gave it to him personally. He read it; he said, "I thought it was good". He didn't say anything else to me. I was hurt and disappointed by his reaction, his non-recognition¹."

How can we speak out and denounce publicly, after the weak reaction of this priest and the lack of empathy and discussion with J. Vanier? Hélène, for her part, recounts an even more humiliating experience:

"I tried to talk about our relationship with an abbot of a monastery who knew him, but he wouldn't listen and quickly said I was making it up. Also with another person who knew him and whom I trusted, who had the same reaction²."

There are other examples of this type of situation, such as that of the L'Arche couple who, during a retreat they led in the United States in July 1985, received the testimony of a victim of T. Philippe and not knowing how to deal with it, decided not to say anything about it. Or that of Gary Mooney, the Jesuit who "saved" J. Farquharson. He had subsequently left the priesthood and the Society of Jesus to become a lawyer. In his new capacity, he confidentially shared his knowledge of the situation with another former Jesuit who later became Chair of the board of L'Arche International, Colin Maloney, who did not follow up. Other former L'Arche leaders also suspected that J. Vanier had had relationships with women but had no idea of their abusive nature. During 2013, it seems that Colin Maloney – who has since died – had exchanges with one of the L'Arche leaders about two cases of women about whom

1. Notes from Corinne's oral testimony to GCPS, 12 July 2019.

2. Interview 51.

he actually knew very little. In relation to one of them – who happens to be J. Farquharson – he appears to have considered that 'all has quietened down', although the Commission is not now in a position to know exactly what knowledge he had of the history of the abusive relationship between J. Vanier and J. Farquharson, or what he was referring to when he spoke of this 'quietening down'.

In any case, these situations show that well before 2014, some people had tried to report the situation but were unable to follow up because of the lack of a satisfactory response. These situations are linked to the questions raised by many members and leaders of L'Arche since February 2020: "How is it possible that we did not see? Did some people cover up these abuses? The examples cited above provide some answers to these questions, without however exhausting them completely. We realise that, although not widely-known, the abuses did not remain completely secret. How then can we explain the silence that prevailed among those who became aware of it? There is not enough material here to provide a sufficiently well-founded answer. However, we can propose some elements for one. First of all, the prestige of the founders, as well as the relationships of authority within L'Arche (see Part 3), partly paralysed the recipients of these testimonies and sometimes pushed them into denial, especially since the socio-cultural context was not very sensitive to these problems. It should also be noted that most of these reports were made in private contexts, sometimes under the oath of secrecy, and that none of them were addressed directly to institutional leaders in office. In the end, these situations perhaps reveal that a statement of this kind can only be listened to if the group that receives it is at least prepared.

In the L'Arche context, the first situation that led to a report being made to institutional leaders was that of Pauline. It took place between April and May 2013 and was unique in that it was made to three different institutions, the Catholic Church and the Bishop of Beauvais, Mgr Jacques Benoit-Gonnin, the leaders of the Trosly-Breuil community and the L'Arche Oise region to which it belongs, and finally the public prosecutor of the Compiègne Court of First Instance. For Pauline, speaking out began during her novitiate. She first talked to her superior, then to her parents, seeking to re-establish a connection with them that had

been damaged by secrecy and wishing to “free” them from the hold of G. Adam, of whom they were faithful supporters. She then confronted G. Adam with them. She met the Bishop of Beauvais on 22 May 2013. Following this meeting, the latter reported the case to the courts, which automatically led to the opening of a preliminary investigation for rape on a vulnerable person. However, the outcome of this was a decision to close the case due to an insufficiently serious offence. The copy of the decision to close the case, dated 26 October 2016, states that there are two contradictory versions, that of Pauline and that of G. Adam, who denies the acts. Both were subjected to psychological assessment, which did not disprove their words. As the acts in question already dated back a long time, the prosecutor found that it was not possible to deny or confirm the existence of a sexual relationship and a possible state of coercion. Pauline could then have asked for the proceedings to be continued by other means, which would have involved much more cumbersome steps than she was prepared to take, due to her frailty. At the same time, Mgr Benoit-Gonnin sought the help of the Paris officialdom, which agreed to conduct a “preliminary investigation”, which did not constitute criminal proceedings. It allowed the competence of the Paris officialdom to establish the facts and hear the various parties, but without opening a canonical procedure. This enquiry issued an opinion in spring of 2014 and, as with the civil justice system, noted the absence of sufficient evidence. However, it considered Pauline’s submission “to be coherent, consistent with her previous stance and credible”¹. No canonical proceedings were opened, but the bishop withdrew G. Adam from all public ministry, strictly forbidding him to hear confession and to offer accompaniment. He also asked G. Adam to leave Trosly-Breuil, which he refused for health reasons. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was consulted and confirmed that there was insufficient evidence to start proceedings, but also that the measures taken by the bishop were well-founded. These remains in place to this day².

1. Copy of a letter from Mgr Benoit-Gonnin to G. Adam, 24 July 2014, AAT.

2. See the letter of 15 April 2016 from Mgr Benoit-Gonnin to Pauline: “The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which I had contacted and to whom I had sent the last elements of the file (the document from the civil proceedings, by which the Public Prosecutor of Compiègne closed the case), has replied to me. It states that

It is then important to pay particular attention to the joint statements made in May-June 2014 by Céline and Joseph and M.-F. Pesneau, which played an important role in the emergence of a collective awareness of the abuses committed by T. Philippe. The first two, Céline and Joseph, testified about their experience to Mgr Barbarin, who, on 6 June 2014, passed on their testimony to Mgr d’Ornellas, Archbishop of Rennes and the accompanying Bishop for L’Arche International. The latter then informed the leaders of L’Arche, Patrick Fontaine and Eileen Glass. Before going to meet Mgr Barbarin, Céline and Joseph had told their story to J. de la Selle, a person they trusted. He had encouraged them in their approach. However, as the *secret confident* for M.-F. Pesneau’s testimony since 2007, the reception of this second report pushed him to act. With the agreement of those concerned, he contacted Patrick Fontaine to pass on their testimonies in turn.

Céline and Joseph’s quest for truth had begun in the 1990s, but it had not been successful because they had unknowingly spoken to the wrong people (M.-D. Philippe and J. Vanier). Two decades later, two events led them to testify again:

“After Brother Thomas Joachim’s statements on Father Marie Dominique’s behaviour, and Jean Vanier who was continuing to proclaim that Father Thomas was a holy man, we contacted Mgr Barbarin who received us very kindly¹.”

As for M.-F. Pesneau, she first approached J. de la Selle in 2007, asking him to remain silent, as she did not feel ready to speak publicly at that time and was concerned about her professional situation within the community. Seven years later, she was retired and then felt able to testify. The recent publications concerning M.-D. Philippe support this new stance, while the second testimony received by J. de la Selle offers her a new opportunity to speak out.

there is no reason to initiate criminal canonical proceedings. It asks me to confirm the measures I took, by letter of 24 July 2014, in the form of a penal precept, by virtue of the general provisions of can. 392 and 1319 of the Code of Canon Law. [...] I therefore carry a precept by which I forbid him from hearing confession and forbid him from exercising spiritual guidance or direction. I simply authorise him to celebrate the Eucharist at his home and, as an exception, in the presence of a few faithful only
1. Interview 104.

This double testimony marks a turning point in the process of victims speaking out and opens the way to a process of collective disentanglement. The institution itself was going through a similar process. The international leaders of L'Arche, who wished the Study Commission to be set up, would have liked it to carry out an in-depth study of the way in which the institution acknowledged and dealt with the testimonies denouncing the abuse perpetrated by T. Philippe and then J. Vanier between 2014 and 2020. To do this, in complete transparency, they provided the Commission with the abundant documentation produced by the crisis cell that was responsible for it (including a detailed logbook of the events that occurred, correspondences between the parties involved, minutes of meetings and testimonies, etc.). Insofar as the Study Commission's enquiry *is part of* the work of understanding the facts carried out by the L'Arche institution, its members felt that they were not in a position to carry out an objective analysis that implies a necessary distance. At the level of the life of the institutions, awareness is recent, and victims, still at the beginning of their personal journeys, are requesting confidentiality. All this leads us to hope that this analysis will be carried out once the historical period in which we are now living is over.

In the meantime, we will limit ourselves here to a brief presentation of the characteristic features and major stages of this period, which runs from 2014 to 2020. Two phases can be distinguished. The first one, between 2014 and 2015, concerns the abuses committed by T. Philippe. The second, between May 2016 and February 2020, concerns those implying J. Vanier.

In the first phase, which we are now presenting, we observe that it is mainly representatives of the Catholic Church who work to verify the facts, listen to the victims and collect new testimonies. In November 2014, it was Bishop d'Ornellas who, as the accompanying Bishop for L'Arche International, commissioned the Dominican Paul-Dominique Marcovits to carry out an investigation which "consists of listening to people as much as possible, in order not only to know the facts in their exactness, but also to show these people that the Church understands their suffering and their words"¹. This investigation lasted three months

1. Letter from Bishop d'Ornellas to Father Marcovits, 18 November 2014, AAR.

and led to the submission of a report by the Dominican on 20 February 2015. The report was given only to the person who requested it, Mgr d'Ornellas, who, in order to protect the confidentiality promised to the victims, only transmitted it orally to the leaders of L'Arche, to whom he only provided a simple written summary. The result of this was made public by the leaders in a letter dated 28 April 2015. Father Marcovits met 13 witnesses and identified 9 victims. His mission was not to identify all the cases. It allowed a first group of victims to be heard, with the quality of listening highlighted by all those we met. Due to a lack of publicity within L'Arche, several victims were unaware of the process and contacted Fr Marcovits or L'Arche leaders in the months following the publication of the results of the investigation. This is notably the case for Cecilia, D. Varnau and J. Farquharson.

This investigation was conducted out of a sincere desire to hear the victims and establish the facts. It marks a major turning point in the denunciation of this system of abuse by allowing the public revelation by the leaders of L'Arche and then by the press that such abuse existed. However, in retrospect, it may seem incomplete and insufficient in scope in relation to the scale of the problem. It is incomplete because it does not include any historical or archival work¹, even though T. Philippe's previous conviction for similar acts was already known to all the players. But also due to the connections that were not made and the interviews that were not conducted. As an example, Pauline's situation is never linked to the investigation or considered as a consequence of T. Philippe's abuse. G. Adam, already accused of abuse at the time, is, however, clearly identified in Trosly-Breuil as a disciple of T. Philippe. Similarly, J. Vanier was not met by the investigator, even

1. It should be noted that as early as June 2013, P. Fontaine, aware that T. Philippe was condemned in 1956, began steps with the Dominican Order (with Fr Bruno Cadore, Master of the Order and with Fr Michel Lachenaud, Provincial of France). Respecting canon law and archival rules, the archivist of the Province of France informed him by email on 10 December 2013 (AAI), that only the CDF was entitled to authorise access to the documents in this file. P. Fontaine then asked for advice from the Procurator of the Dominican Order in Rome, Fr. Philippe Toxé, who in his reply of 1^{er} February 2014 (AAI), reiterated that the CDF's archival documents could not be sent and affirmed that there were not enough elements to understand the situation of T. Philippe in the Order's archives!.

though Céline and Joseph said that they had informed him of the abuse committed by T. Philippe and that he was obviously a key player in his story. Mgr d'Ornellas met him on 22 February 2015 to inform him of the conclusions of the investigation but without obtaining any further information from him. Generally speaking, it is the systemic dimension of the problem that remains ignored at this time.

In highlighting these shortcomings, the aim is not to condemn the work done, the importance of which we recognise. We also know how easy it is to formulate remarks *a posteriori*, with all the information we have at our disposal today and the clear awareness that this information has allowed us to acquire. We are also aware of the enormous effort and the many steps taken by P. Fontaine and E. Glass during this first period.

Pointing out these shortcomings enables one to highlight the blind spots that persisted at the time and the slowness of the process of collective disentanglement. Thus, J. Vanier remained protected by the aura of sanctity that surrounded him and his stature as founder; the voices of the women he abused cannot yet be heard under these conditions. Finally, we note that L'Arche International totally deferred to Mgr d'Ornellas by agreeing not to receive the report. Even if the respect of confidentiality and the protection of the victims required it, L'Arche, the party most concerned, thus deprived itself of the possibility of questioning the results and deprived the investigation of a collegial dimension that is absolutely essential to the understanding of these problems.

However, despite these shortcomings, this investigation distresses the precarious balance of lies and silence on which the system of abuse was maintained. It sets off a chain reaction that will allow other testimonies to emerge, including the first ones concerning J. Vanier. Before turning to those, it is important to recall that this process of speaking out placed some of the victims in difficult positions. This is particularly the case for M.-F. Pesneau. We will not repeat here the details of her experience in Trosly-Breuil since 2014, which she describes in detail in her book. We will simply mention the difficult confrontation with the hostile reactions of those who, at the outset, were openly in denial. But also to the complicit silence of J. Vanier who tries to say as little as possible about it. In fact, she was confronted with a community group strongly

affected by the culture of secrecy and things left unsaid, which cannot at this time free itself from them. Her position is difficult at the time and M.-F. Pesneau now perceived herself as an undesirable element. This was also the case of J. de la Selle, who supported her along with a small group of longstanding members. Many suspected that they wished to settle scores with the community and instrumentalize the abuses. In fact, it was not until the announcement of the enquiry into J. Vanier in June 2019, some months after his death, that his influence dissipated and the reality of the system of abuse that had been present in the community since its foundation became obvious to almost everyone.

As mentioned, the first report concerning Jean Vanier was a direct result of the investigation carried out in 2014-2015. L'Arche leaders who were in charge of managing the situation generally refer to J. Farquharson's testimony as the first. However, they do not hide the fact that they had in fact received the first one a year and a half earlier, in December 2014. This was from a woman who made contact with E. Glass, expressing her distress, the abusive nature of her relationship with J. Vanier and its close resemblance to those described by the victims of T. Philippe. However, this woman demands that she remains anonymous and that her testimony remain confidential. Asking L'Arche not to do anything with her testimony, she explained that she contacted L'Arche with the sole aim of warning the leaders that they would be dealing with other testimonies concerning J. Vanier in the months or years to come. This testimony, if it is understood by the L'Arche officials, placed them in a delicate position. It was not until the beginning of 2016 that the first usable situation appeared.

Among the women who could not be heard in the Marcovits enquiry, D. Maronde Varnau and Cecilia contacted J. Farquharson and encouraged her to give her testimony. They sent it to Mgr d'Ornellas, Patrick Fontaine, Eileen Glass and Stephan Posner (then leader of L'Arche in France) in a letter dated 9th May 2016. The testimony written under the pseudonym of "Myriam" is directly in line with those concerning T. Philippe, since it is entitled "My complicated testimony regarding Father Thomas Philippe". However, it is the abusive relationship with J. Vanier that she testifies about, thus opening the second phase of the 2014-2020 period.

When the international leaders received this alert, they quickly informed the “crisis unit” set up for T. Philippe. This cell (of variable configurations) includes a core group that is regularly informed and participates in decision-making: the international leaders (P. Fontaine and E. Glass until 2017, then S. Posner and Stacy Cates-Carney), the Leader of L'Arche in France (S. Posner, then Pierre Jacquand), Isabelle Aumont (employee of the J. Vanier association), Mgr d'Ornellas, Anaïs de Montjoye¹ as well as Jean-Claude Mallet, a senior civil servant close to L'Arche, in which he was an administrator. As J. Vanier was not a cleric, his situation does not concern the Church directly, and this time it is L'Arche that will carry out the work of collecting testimonies and verifying the facts. It should be noted that, this time, the process took on a collegial dimension with the contribution of personalities from outside L'Arche, which allowed for an open debate with differing views. It would also call on Denis Vaginay, a psychologist and psychoanalyst from outside L'Arche but who had already been involved as a trainer, as well as Anne Shearer, a psychologist close to L'Arche. They would each be asked to provide a qualified opinion on the testimony received. Based on the written testimony, they came to similar conclusions: that it was difficult to accurately describe the nature of the relationship. They invite L'Arche leaders to be cautious. At the same time, J. Farquharson states that she is willing to let the people leading the various L'Arche international bodies know about her testimony, but that she does not want it to be known beyond this restricted circle. When approached again, the woman who testified in December 2014 maintained her wish not to be involved.

In these circumstances, the crisis unit decided to wait for new material, while preparing to receive such material and having to present the known facts to the members of L'Arche and the broader public one day. In this context, during the summer of 2016, P. Fontaine, E. Glass and S. Posner met regularly with J. Vanier and insisted that he explains not only this relationship, but also its possible link with the practices of T. Philippe. Here is E. Glass's recollection of these exchanges and of J. Vanier's reactions:

1. A professional in crisis management and communication, who has accompanied many religious organizations for the past fifteen years.

“So, we took her letter [J. Farquharson's testimony], her anonymous letter to Jean and we gave it to him. And he read it, and he immediately identified her. So, there was no defensiveness, there was no excusing, there was just, yes, this is who this person is. [...] And, and he never denied that relationship. But he always maintained that he thought it was a good and acceptable way to relate. And she's probably told you, I mean: “one of the things” she said to me “that stays with me was he keeps asking forgiveness, but he's never said he's sorry”. And it was that blindness in him to understand what was really happening and do you know, I might have recounted to you Claire in our last conversation, the time that I sat with him and he said: “people say that I'm powerful, but I'm just me”. And I said to him: “I understand when you say you're just you because, you know, people do that to me in a way too”, I said: “but you're Jean Vanier and you have profile and you have influence and you have authority. Like, of course, you're powerful! ”. But he never got that. He never could acknowledge what that meant. And, and especially when I looked back both with père Thomas and with Jean, and saw in how many instances the women involved were 20 years younger than these men at the time. That's already a question of power¹.”

On the possible similarity between this relationship and those of T. Philippe, J. Vanier does not explicitly answer in the affirmative but confides, as already mentioned, that he began a relationship of this type with J. d'Halluin on 15 June 1952.

Once again, we note several elements which, *in retrospect*, seem significant regarding the difficulties inherent in this process of collective disentanglement. As before, no link is made with the situation of G. Adam, who does not appear at any time in the logbook of the crisis unit. The situation of the founders and the consequences of this becoming public remain the priority. Although the systemic dimension is beginning to be perceived, it is not yet perceived in its full extent. We also note that, despite its greater collegiality, the use of external expertise, and its real capacity to receive testimonies, the crisis unit remains marked by institutional issues, which perhaps curtail progress on certain questions. Thus, one may wonder why, when in the summer of 2016 J. Vanier admitted to having had a mystical-sexual relationship of the same nature as those of T. Philippe, the questioning was not taken further.

1. Interview with Eileen Glass, 20 October 2021, AAI.

We would stress once again that we must be careful not to make an *a posteriori* judgement here. We must consider the shock that these discoveries represent for the leaders of L'Arche, many of whom have a strong bond with their founder. It should also be recalled that at that time, no one had a clear and complete overview of the extent of the system of abuse of which J. Vanier was only one part. The Dominican archives, to which Patrick Fontaine had already requested access in 2013, are still closed and the NFA documents found at J. Vanier's house were not yet accessible. Without these essential documents and the long work of analysis required to understand them properly, it was difficult to construct a clear vision of the facts.

All of this also demonstrates the clout that J. Vanier still has at this time and the leaders' in completely detaching themselves from him. The desire to confront him and obtain answers from him is obvious, but in certain respects it resembles a form of negotiation in which one advances with caution and respect, faced with a man who seeks to say as little as possible. Patrick Fontaine, who was the first to bear this heavy burden, has often expressed his concern to preserve the unity of the Federation. This was his responsibility, but it also shows how difficult it is for an institution to free itself from the issue of its balance and perpetuation. The fact is somehow inevitable and the only valid solution to remedy it is the outsourcing of the enquiry processes to external bodies and people, which we know was the option chosen when there was a new testimony in March 2019.

PART 5

Psychiatric hypotheses

Translation: *Caroline Lefour*

CHAPTER 19
Abuse, delusion and perversion

Bernard Granger

Introduction

This section offers a psychopathological frame of reference for the events featured in this report. The psychiatrist's voice complements the voices of historians, sociologists, theologians and psychoanalysts like members of a choir.

The events that have left their mark on L'Arche, and more particularly on the action of its founders, Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier, are a fascinating but difficult subject for psychiatrists.

Fascinating because these events span nearly a century. It's been a long journey for historians to ensure we understand the complexity and many ramifications. Difficult because psychiatrists are generally advised against providing a diagnosis of people they have not been able to examine directly. There is a constant risk of reductionism in psychiatry. It is important not to reduce an individual to the pathological traits attributed to them. This is one of the lessons learned from living with people with disabilities.

However, and in the first instance, once these principles are established, the ethics of psychiatry permit the formulation of hypotheses, provided unfounded certitudes are avoided. We have – and quite rightly so – been requested to propose psychiatric hypotheses to complement multidisciplinary answers to the questions posed by the study commission created by L'Arche Internationale. This, in no way, presumes the presence of psychiatric disorders, even in the broadest sense of the term.

Secondly, we are obliged to take into account the testimonies of sexual acts made by various people intimately associated with J. Vanier, particularly those who responded to the survey conducted in 2019 by Global Child Protection Services (GCPS) Consulting¹, and additional testimonies collected for this study². The observed behaviours, however typical, also unfold according to psychopathological patterns which are developed in this text.

Thirdly, it is important to describe the approach taken to the many issues raised by this psychopathological analysis. How reliable are the documents and testimonies available to the commission's researchers? Which significant historical elements should be used? Do archives, correspondence, and testimonies contain "symptoms" of mental disturbance? How can mystical and theological aspects of debatable psychiatric nature be integrated into medical analysis? We provide references for the assumptions herein, but they should be taken with caution. They will undoubtedly give rise to discussion and dispute.

Apparently, J. Vanier never sought help from a psychiatrist or psychotherapist, despite having a positive rapport with several of them as part of his work with people with disabilities at L'Arche. In the book entitled *Leur regard perce nos ombres*, the collection of letters between Julia Kristeva and J. Vanier, the latter made this confession, seemingly banal for readers at the time but interpreted completely differently today:

"Your irritation is perhaps a sign that your psychoanalyst's eagle eye suspects something unconfessed behind my smile and expressions of gratitude. You're not wrong. I have - perhaps we all do - fears, prejudices, hidden elements, things we avoid that we don't want to or cannot see. Personally, I don't feel the need to pursue this work on myself any further."³

No one was able to seriously conduct the analysis that J. Vanier himself refused. The fact that he was on his guard is nevertheless significant. Was he too aware of his flaws? Was he afraid that the nature of what he

1. Global Child Protection Services Consulting, Final Report of an internal review into historical safeguarding concerns commissioned by L'Arche International, May 2019-February 2020, 2020.

2. See the annexe for a list of testimonies collected by the commission.

3. J. Kristeva, J. Vanier, *Leur regard perce nos ombres*, Paris, Fayard, 2011, p. 228.

called "hidden elements" would be deduced? It is regrettable that he did not consider analysis useful: his trajectory might have been different.

Methodology

LIMITATIONS OF RETROSPECTIVE DIAGNOSIS

It is not necessary to make one or more diagnoses. For past events, an accepted distinction is made between retrospective and "retrolective" diagnosis. Current criteria are used for retrospective diagnosis, whereas retrolective diagnosis applies understanding of illnesses at the time of the events. In this case, the distinction has only relative pertinence, as the period is recent and conceptions for describing and classifying mental disorders have only evolved to a limited extent.

The difficulties of retrospective diagnosis are mainly due to the inability to directly collect symptoms by conducting clinical interviews with the person concerned. Also, J. Vanier spent his life hiding what he suspected would be incomprehensible to outsiders. As a result, J. Vanier's revelations about himself were often more a matter of personal mythology and dissimulation. It is important to interpret them accordingly, including from a psychopathological perspective. They are not authentic clinical elements which can be used directly. There are therefore two obstacles, the second of which requires clarification using historical data.

Finally, a systemic approach must be added to the individual approach. It is impossible to explain J. Vanier's trajectory without referring to the group around T. Philippe, of which he was a key member.

PROPOSED HYPOTHESES

Our analysis is based on the mostly fresh historical material gathered by the commission's historians and many interviews conducted since its work began. The quantity is impressive¹.

The facts are difficult to establish because witnesses make mistakes and misrepresent the truth. We must often resort to cross-checking and conjecture.

1. See the list of sources at the end of this report.

Psychiatrists usually work with a patient to develop hypotheses, diagnose or suspend their judgement, propose physical, chemical, and psychic therapies then observe the results which more or less confirm the diagnosis. They try to classify the patient, or to catalogue them as accurately as possible: some cases are typical, others are less clear. Observation over time and continued clinical investigation are used to correct the approach. It is a dynamic process, constantly revised.

The approach is different for retrospective investigations, like J. Vanier's case study. Available and often incomplete information must be analysed to reflect on hypotheses, and positives and negatives weighed up, before deciding on the most probable hypothesis. It is also important to bear in mind that new documents or testimonies may change the assessment.

Sexual abuse

The sexual acts attributed to J. Vanier by several women are considered abusive. Divested of spiritual justification, they demonstrate typical characteristics of this kind of behaviour, as the following testimonies demonstrate¹.

Charismatic, J. Vanier inspired admiration and reverence - his reputation for holiness was carefully developed²- and was prone to passionate impulses. Almost assured of beatification, his charisma and prestige dispelled any critical capacity in his admirers.

Testimonies by women who had intimate relationships with J. Vanier reveal a fairly precise *modus operandi* which indicates the perversity inherent in this type of behaviour. J. Vanier often selected his "prey" by offering accompaniment. After a seduction phase, he established a kind of subjugation imbued with religious fervour before progressing to explicit acts. The initial limit of abuse is difficult to pinpoint and was committed without violence, appearing consensual.

He proceeded gradually with brief contact or short kisses, despite the basic ethics of accompaniment stipulating clear physical and

1. Testimonies gathered by GCPS and the commission, analysed in Part 4 of this report.

2. See Chapter 5.

emotional distance. He was very tactile throughout his deviant spiritual guidance or community accompaniment¹, taking an interest in lips, breasts and genitals in a very gradual manner. He showed an acute sense for seizing occasions, inspiring surprise or amazement, aware of what the person would or not accept. These acts did not involve vaginal penetration². He knew when to stop and let his prey escape if they did not accept his advances. They were ordered to keep these relationships secret.

The abused person's astonishment was foiled by religious justification³. Gradually developed intimacy to the point of sexual acts is very destructive because the abused person considers they share responsibility for their humiliation. They begin by thinking they are chosen, then realise they are not unique and used rather than loved. They understand that, despite its duration, the relationship is stereotyped and limited to brief encounters. Feelings of bitterness or anger ensue. It is possible they will suffer from their experience with J. Vanier years later, when the loss of this apparent support could cause mental breakdown. Only long psychological analysis can help them to move on, if indeed it is possible. J. Vanier knew how to maintain a friendly and attentive relationship when the abused person so desired.

There are exceptions to this pattern. In one case, J. Vanier shared his life with one of L'Arche's managers, with whom he shared everyday life. She looked after him and lived in the apartment adjoining his during the last years of his life. Their close relationship began triggering reactions as early as the 1970s. One assistant thought they were married on his arrival at Trosly-Breuil⁴. Several testimonies suggest their relationship was very close.

Another person accompanied in a transgressive framework by J. Vanier did not consider herself controlled or their intimate relations

1. Spiritual guidance concerned inner life and religious aspects, whereas accompaniment in the community concerned life at L'Arche.

2. See *infra* note 53.

3. For example, when a consecrated woman asked him how to reconcile her intimate relationship with her commitment to Jesus, he answered: "Jesus and I are one and the same." Interview 52.

4. Interview 82.

abusive. She described J. Vanier as “gracious and respectful”. She said their relationship “sustainably and deeply engaged her whole being” and fulfilled her “aspiration to live in the divine light”. She acknowledged the “unusual” nature of the relationship, but said it never caused her suffering.

Typically, abusers minimise or ignore the suffering they inflict on their prey and feel no guilt. “My conscience is clear,” said J. Vanier when talking to a former psychiatrist for L’Arche, Erol Franko after the first complaint about him¹. He defended himself, saying he considered they had given their consent freely. J. Vanier would say with almost amused detachment: “In fact, I think those women must have been in love with me.”² If they married, they were “repudiated”. The difficulty in extracting any expression of compassion from J. Vanier for people abused by T. Philippe or himself speaks volumes. Several women told him how much they had suffered from their relationship with him. His reply was that he thought it had been good for them, not acknowledging the abusive nature of his conduct.

Abuse in religious circles is often based on the misuse of spirituality and sacred texts. The abuser presents themselves as a medium for God’s love. This is clearly the case for J. Vanier, who often mixed erotic remarks and references with Jesus, Mary, or the Holy Spirit in his correspondence³.

On first impressions, the spiritual and sexual abuse committed by J. Vanier was typical. Nevertheless, each abuser is individual, and their actions are influenced by their personality, the context, and, in this case, the group to which they belong.

Jean Vanier’s personality

Many people who participated in life at L’Arche, who knew J. Vanier closely or worked with him as active or honorary leader of the institution have provided direct and relatively consistent testimonies⁴.

1. Interview 34.

2. *Ibid.*

3. See Chapter 6.

4. See the list of interviews conducted by the commission in the annexe to this report.

J. Vanier is characterised by several personality traits: charisma, seduction, manipulation, tendency for secrecy, desire for popularity, force of persuasion and suggestion, avoidance of frontal conflict, and authoritarianism. He was an exceptional leader, as demonstrated by the L’Arche’s success and expansion across all the continents in just a few years. J. Vanier displayed abundant energy, constant creativity, and a desire to help with affection and humour. He was an admired speaker and had resounding success around the world.

His public presentations featured a surprisingly gentle tone, which could even be described as cloying. J. Vanier spoke to his audience’s hearts, to their good intentions rather than their intellect. The intellectual content of his presentations was rather weak, approximate and featured few innovative concepts¹. He captured his audience by creating a hazy, almost unreal climate. He murmured sentences without much substance, lulling his audience. He referred to Jesus as if he shared his life intimately in a privileged relationship.

J. Vanier’s verbal ease and oratory skills attracted many people. He had particularly effective impact on young adults on a quest for purpose, looking for an alternative to the conventional life of other people of their age. Working with people with disabilities was imbued with transcendental meaning by J. Vanier, attracting young adults in large numbers who answered his call: “Come to Trosly!”, regardless of their capacity for the role.

J. Vanier’s reputed piety bestowed him with additional credibility and was an additional attraction for Catholics. He was like a diva, surrounded by admirers, mostly women. Being included in his circle or court was a coveted privilege for some. A feeling of exclusion sometimes resulted in resentment.

J. Vanier also had the ability to trust his employees and challenged them to test their capacities. They didn’t all succeed, but J. Vanier’s trust was powerful leverage for positive results.

J. Vanier showed highly developed social intelligence. He sensed the limits of his relations with others. He seduced the powerful, donors, representatives of public authorities, and politicians. He also seduced humbler people met on his international travels.

1. See Chapter 4 and Part 7.

His height contributed to his charisma and power of seduction. Reactions, sometimes typical of a “big kid”, reflected his immaturity and a desire to foster a form of closeness. He used humour and laughed at “simple things” that might have seemed ridiculous in other contexts.

J. Vanier never confronted his opponents. As a leader, he preferred to avoid debates. He achieved his goals by intriguing behind the scenes or choosing trusted spokespeople. This lack of confrontation is also noticeable in his intellectual research and the way he avoided debates and roundtables with strong, critical theologians and personalities.

When faced with difficulties, such as the revelations about sexual abuse by T. Philippe, J. Vanier was somewhat duplicitous. He feigned surprise or lied, saying he no longer remembered why T. Philippe had been severely condemned by the Vatican in 1956, or asserting that he could not comment because it concerned people who were still alive.

It is difficult to say whether these lies were intended to preserve his group’s secrets or demonstrated contempt for simple truths which had no value considering the certainties of a higher order engrained in his belief system by T. Philippe.

The different aspects of J. Vanier’s life could be described as confused. Nothing was clearly defined: L’Arche was intended to be both a medico-social structure and a pseudo-religious order. Unmarried and with a secret sex life, J. Vanier aspired to become a priest but was refused by Rome. He nevertheless gave spiritual guidance and community accompaniment with no strict rules or authorisation. He constantly established new modes of governance, communities, commitments, training programmes, and structures in perpetual movement. J. Vanier’s writings and speeches also reveal confusion, with insufficient intellectual and theological rigour¹.

J. Vanier was also adept with the media which he used to promote himself and L’Arche. He was particularly sought out by Catholic journalists who treated him like a star, crowning him with praise. His popularity transcended Catholic circles and his work resounded in the media worldwide².

1. See Chapter 4 and Part 7.

2. See Chapter 5. See other examples: Article by Andrew Brown, “In praise of ... Jean Vanier”, *The Guardian*, 13 March 2015 when the Templeton Prize was awarded; Documentary by Randall Wright, *Summer in the Forest*, 2018, and the special KTO report on the day of J. Vanier’s death, 7 May 2019: URL: [youtube.com/watch?v=0lao2dEv-D0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lao2dEv-D0).

Finally, J. Vanier did not disclose much. Was he on guard, constantly on the lookout because he had so much to hide? Was the construction of his character in danger if contradicted? Did he need to maintain the mystery, letting others project their own fantasies on L’Arche’s founder? Was his reserve a result of his education? Undoubtedly, some or all of the above.

Every personality is too rich and unique to be categorised, and this also applies to J. Vanier. Psychiatric categories of pathological personalities are not easy to apply in J. Vanier’s case. Due to a lack of sufficiently reliable information, any other categorisation would be in vain in this case.

On the other hand, the Enneagram Personality Test, in which some L’Arche members received training, can be applied with caution¹. George Durner introduced the Enneagram to L’Arche². It distinguishes nine personality types³. As is often the case, J. Vanier attributed himself a different type to that attributed to him by others who were undoubtedly more objective. J. Vanier attributed himself type 6. George Durner and others attributed him with type 3, typical of leaders who seek popularity and success. Type 3 personalities lie and pretend to project a positive image. They are vain, wanting to be seen as special, as above others.

Type 6, which Jean Vanier considered himself, desires recognition for their integrity and is averse to deviance. Type 3, on the other hand, strives to project a positive image and lies readily. Jean de la Selle stated: “Jean had a complicated relationship with the truth. He adapted

1. This personality typology of esoteric origin was developed by Oscar Ichazo in Chile from the 1960s and Claudio Raranjo in the United States from the 1970s. It was later adapted to Catholic doctrine by the American Jesuit Robert Ochs and became very popular.

2. George Durner managed L’Arche communities in Canada and France, before managing training for L’Arche International.

3. The classification describes nine types of personality based on core desires and fears. Enneatype 1 desires recognition for the quality of their actions and fears anger; Enneatype 2 desires recognition for their commitment to others and fears their own needs; Enneatype 3 desires recognition for its successes and fears failure; Enneatype 4 desires recognition for their unique qualities and fears banality; Enneatype 5 desires recognition for their knowledge and fears incompetence; Enneatype 6 desires recognition for their integrity and fears deviance; Enneatype 7 desires recognition for contentment and fears suffering; Enneatype 8 desires recognition for their strength and fears weakness; Enneatype 9 desires recognition for inner peace and fears conflict.

to his audience.”¹ Types 3 and 6 can be used to make a simplified connection between the public and private person. Type 6, perhaps a partial facet of J. Vanier, features doubt, fear, cowardice, loyalty, and a fear of being without support and guidance.

From another complementary point of view, a psychoanalyst might consider that J. Vanier’s personality was not structured, similar to a borderline state, neither psychotic nor neurotic². Such lack of structure leads to immaturity, control and dependence³. Perverse behaviour and delusional beliefs are also possible⁴.

Thomas Philippe’s influence

What would J. Vanier have become without T. Philippe? The Dominican had a deep influence on the diplomat’s son⁵. It is difficult to dissociate them. It is important to remember that T. Philippe was also spiritual guide to J. Vanier’s mother. He had a strong influence - even psychological hold - on her. It is fair to presume that J. Vanier was the ideal prey, given his immaturity and unstructured personality, lack of direction, extreme and constant religious fervour, and the high esteem Pauline and Georges Vanier had for the Dominican. It was fertile ground for T. Philippe’s charismatic seduction of J. Vanier.

J. Vanier’s intellectual and sexual education was provided nearly exclusively by T. Philippe. J. Vanier confided in a close contact that he had only read T. Philippe’s works for ten years, probably the period before the creation of L’Arche⁶. This is certainly exaggerated, considering J. Vanier’s thesis work⁷ alone. But such confidence indicates J. Vanier’s fascination for T. Philippe and his quickly developed dependency.

1. Quoted by Michèle-France Pesneau, *L’Emprise*, Villeurbanne, Editions Golias, 2021, p. 269.

2. For more information on this subject : Jean Bergeret, *La Dépression et les états-limites*, Paris, Payot, 1975.

3. See Part 6.

4. See *infra* note 124.

5. See Chapter 2.

6. Interview 56.

7. See Chapter 4.

J. Vanier was impressed by L’Eau Vive’s founder from the outset. In 1994, a year after the death of his mentor, he wrote:

“Meeting Father Thomas changed my life. He was clearly a man of God, through his word, his attitude, the way he listened, and the peace he irradiated. He inspired my desire to be in the silence of God. He referred to Jesus and Mary constantly as though he was intimate with them. He encouraged me to trust them, to ask them everything, to listen to them, and to remain in their presence. As soon as I met him, it was clear to me that our Heavenly Father had brought him to me as a spiritual father at this crucial moment in my life. He also became my intellectual master.”¹

It is likely that T. Philippe quickly realised how he could take advantage of the young man who approached him in 1950. It is clear that J. Vanier was quickly dominated - even bewitched - by his spiritual father. The correspondence between the two men illustrates this². A Vatican member wrote that J. Vanier was T. Philippe’s “*il più fanatico discepolo*”³, a clear indication of how they perceived the relationship and T. Philippe’s absolute domination over J. Vanier⁴. T. Philippe was J. Vanier’s insurance in the outside world, providing a backbone to his psychic life. T. Philippe’s hold over J. Vanier persisted throughout his whole life⁵.

T. Philippe used J. Vanier as a loyal lieutenant to avoid his order’s supervision during the entire period that J. Vanier was prohibited from contacting him. J. Vanier was the accomplice to and participated directly in sexual encounters organised by T. Philippe during those years⁶. He practised the same sexual “prayers” that T. Philippe never ceased. He was a member of the group known as the “*tout petits*” (little ones). In fact, he became a key player. This role was described in detail by Cardinal Paul Philippe in his 1977 report which severely criticised J. Vanier’s discernment⁷ when he requested ordination.

1. Jean Vanier, preface to Thomas Philippe, *Des miettes pour tous – Conseils pour la vie intérieure et la prière du cœur*, Paris, Saint-Paul Ed. Religieuses, 1994.

2. See Chapter 6.

3. “the most fanatical disciple”

4. Response given by the Holy Office for the Pope at the hearing on 2 April 1959, ACDF.

5. See *infra* notes 42 and 43.

6. See Chapter 2.

7. “L’ordination sacerdotale de M. Jean Vanier. *Votum*. du cardinal Paul Philippe”, 9 March 1977, ACDF.

T. Philippe asked J. Vanier to join him at Trosly where he was Val Fleury chaplain. That is where the disciple, inspired by his mentor, was led to found L'Arche¹. It was also undoubtedly a way of recreating L'Eau Vive's "secret society" to disguise his practices.

Sharing life with people with mental disabilities or mental illness was not a new practice. For example, in 1848, Protestant Pastor John Bost founded Laforce, near Bergerac, in the Dordogne, where the mentally ill were often left to their own devices. John Bost built small, personal "asylums" where residents received an education and lived fuller lives². There were also cases of family patronage in rural Gheel, Belgium at the end of the 19th century where the mentally unstable lived with foster families³. Closer to home, the institutional therapy⁴ movement began after the Second World War when mental asylums were likened to concentration camps. The Anti-psychiatric movement also tried to find different living conditions for people with mental disabilities⁵. As J. Vanier states about the creation of L'Arche: "At the time, many people were waiting to leave big institutions to find places to live, to be free to work and have friends; places where they could be considered as people."⁶ Soon after, particularly in the wake of May 1968, community life was an ideal for those who refused what consumer society had to offer. L'Arche corresponded to their aspirations.

L'Arche was a welcome solution for people left without proper care at the Clermont de l'Oise psychiatric hospital where most of its population came from. Life at L'Arche was different and shared more completely. Some visitors even had difficulty differentiating between residents and assistants. J. Vanier wanted unmarried assistants living in the home with almost priestly dedication. He was known to have negative reactions when assistants announced their marriage or pregnancy. L'Arche was also an active marriage agency, despite its founders' almost monastic ideal.

1. See *infra* note 76 for T. Philippe's reasons for taking this direction.

2. John Bost, *Les Asiles de Laforce (Dordogne) reconnus par l'état comme établissement d'utilité publique le 7 septembre 1877*, Paris, Librairies Protestantes, 1878.

3. Jules Duval, *Gheel, ou Une colonie d'aliénés vivant en famille et en liberté*, Paris Hachette et Cie, 1867.

4. Jean Oury, *La Psychothérapie institutionnelle de Saint-Alban à La Borde*, Paris, Éditions d'Une, 2016.

5. Jacques Hochmann, *Les Antipsychiatries: une histoire*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2015.

6. Julia Kristeva, Jean Vanier, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

J. Vanier's loyalty to T. Philippe never wavered. He had no alternative but to officially condemn T. Philippe's sexual abuse when it was revealed to the public. Yet, the condemnation was wrung from him¹. He never denied the central and almost vital influence the Dominican had on him. He even recalled and highlighted it when T. Philippe was accused. He told Pierre Jacquand, head of L'Arche France, about the heads of L'Arche International who criticised him after the revelations about T. Philippe's sexual abuse: "They don't understand. I couldn't have done everything I did without Father Philippe. I couldn't have founded L'Arche."² The psychic hold was so strong that denying T. Philippe would mean denying himself, risking a breakdown³. But his loyalty also caused him anguish. A few weeks before his death in early 2019, J. Vanier also told Pierre Jacquand: "I'm anxious because I'm Father Thomas's spiritual son."⁴ Perhaps he had realised what would become public after his death and the real nature of the hidden life he had concealed from the outside world, perpetuating it to the end.

J. Vanier was very hypocritical in 2015 when he wrote that he was unaware of T. Philippe's actions, despite being fully informed. See the extract below from his letter written in May 2015:

"I learned of the accusations against Father Thomas a few weeks ago. I was upset and shocked. I couldn't fathom how it was possible. I was even more shocked that these revelations were made long after his death, and about events dating as far back as the 1970s. I was told of certain facts several years ago, but I was totally unaware of how serious they were until now. I am very disturbed by these revelations.

[...] There is an immense difference between the seriousness of the facts that caused so much suffering in the victims, and God's action through F. Thomas in L'Arche and me. It is impossible for me to peacefully reconcile these two realities. All I can say is: "I don't understand". I can't judge Father Thomas; only God can judge. Jesus is merciful. He forgives with love. I am at peace when I assert that "I do not understand" and do not judge."⁵

1. Interview 12.

2. Interview 4.

3. The term he used before a woman who did not consider herself a victim, despite the abusive nature of their relationship: "Later, he also spoke of his despair when he had to denounce Father Thomas in a public letter." Interview 51.

4. Interview 4.

5. Public letter from J. Vanier, May 2015.

Despite sharing the same spirituality and committing the same abuse, he made a statement in a second public letter dated 17 October 2015 that appear to disavow him:

“I mourn Father Thomas as I knew him.

(...) I was not aware that he used Marian spirituality in such a perverted way (...). Father Philippe has betrayed my trust with these repeated and reprehensible actions.

I would like to add that there is no link between the spirituality or theology put forward by Father Thomas which justified his abusive relations with women, and the spirituality of L’Arche as it is conceived, developed and lived since it began.”¹

It is important to stress this last point about L’Arche. J. Vanier surely used it to protect himself and to avoid confusion between L’Eau Vive and L’Arche, and between himself and T. Philippe. But it is only partly true, given that what influenced T. Philippe to turn to the mentally ill is not what led him to sexual practices justified by false mysticism².

Yet J. Vanier confirmed the durable effect T. Philippe’s doctrine had on him, saying:

“I didn’t sense much change in his spiritual direction between L’Eau Vive and Trosly. The goal was always to put people in the presence of God and help them feel what Mary wanted, what Jesus wanted. It was very simple: be in the presence of God and listen to him. The goal was always prayer. I would essentially describe L’Eau Vive as a school of prayer. L’Eau Vive was so poor and Father Thomas’s leadership led to inner poverty, abandonment, listening to Jesus and Mary, plunged into God’s presence.”³

1. Public letter from J. Vanier, 17 October 2016.

2. See *infra* note 76.

3. Xavier Le Pichon, Report on the place of Father Thomas Philippe in the L’Arche foundation, 10 May 2016, p. 3.

Jean Vanier’s sexual life

J. Vanier’s first sexual experience of the practices of the “*tout petits*” practices reportedly took place on 15 June 1952¹. He described it as a revelation. Jacqueline d’Halluin, a member of the “*tout petits*” group and sexually intimate with T. Philippe who she accompanied on tours, was responsible. It is unknown whether it was the initial discovery of sexuality or the discovery of a different sexuality, gentle dulcet and swathed steeped in religious fervour. The impact of the conditions of initial experiences in future sexuality is recognised. J. Vanier spoke about a kind of enlightenment several times, stating: “I was looking for communion rather than sexuality.” He also said this loving relationship carried him for years, “until the foundation of L’Arche”². It can be compared to the founding experience of the “wedding night” experienced by T. Philippe with the Virgin Mary in 1938³. This introduction to the sexual practices of T. Philippe’s group took place just over two months after T. Philippe was forced to leave L’Eau Vive on 3 April 1952 when J. Vanier was appointed to replace him as director. This is likely to have been a way of ensuring continuity, given the threat of suspicions by Dominican leaders.

Whether there were sexual relations between J. Vanier and T. Philippe is not clear. It is possible that T. Philippe also wanted to brand J. Vanier from a sexual point of view, electing him as a disciple with a vocation to perpetuate. An undated letter from T. Philippe to J. Vanier, which seems to speak of physical intimacy between them, also suggests that the distinction between the sexes is outdated (see last sentences):

“I just wanted to let you know that our meeting last Thursday left a lasting deep memory, [partic.] the most intimate moments. They [often] revived in the x., as [to finish] and to plunge + into love (in the peace of the x.) what had been initiated... That is what they want, more and more. We are together gestures, that must be relived in the x., and by this They want to unite or come in an increasingly divine way - I felt it so strongly with Did. Between brother and friends united so supernaturally, there remain domains of myself which are not purified by love (that is, which are not [illegible word] which remain a little hardened by the self, where it takes graces of union to allow

1. See Chapter 1 about J. Vanier’s sexuality prior to this episode.

2. See Chapter 2 on this key episode and its significance.

3. See *infra* note 62.

one to see them... And I feel so strongly that these gestures and these words, which are the [xxxx.] and the signs of this life of union, establish between us even in the external relations a completely [different] union, much more divine... As [divinely] between two brothers in Jesus, two brothers [two illegible words] and for [illegible word] the love m. of Jesus, Jesus wanting them to know each other and that they love each other with [the love of a Spouse] ... it is by this that Jesus wants to make it clear that He no longer sees us as xx. [the] [illegible word, three letters followed by a period] orig. where there would be or have been harmony between grace and nature, where Love would have used nature for divine purposes xx. [no] in a manner [proportionate] to nature... Jesus, by his hidden life, by his sacrifice, is still much freer to give us, already here on earth, the joys of heaven, where the distinction of the sexes and its complementary aspect for the purposes of nature, no longer has reason... It only persists for divine games of love.”¹

J. Vanier continued the sexual behaviour of the “*tout petits*” group which he joined. According to currently available testimonies, this sexual behaviour only concerned adult women. He seduced during spiritual guidance sessions, indulging in oral and manual intercourse without penetration².

The meetings were often fleeting. Sometimes, he tried to organise longer meetings or a whole night in a Parisian apartment or in bedrooms of institutions where he was welcomed for retreats or work meetings. There is probably a network of women who could be considered abused around the world. The full extent of his acts is yet to be determined.

There are mixed allusions - coded and not - to joys of past and future sex in his letters to various nuns and laywomen. They confirm dates and references to Jesus and Mary, sometimes in the same sentence with the same fervour³. In one letter, he speaks of sexual organs as “sacred organs”⁴. Despite distancing himself from T. Philippe by becoming L’Arche’s leader, even coming into conflict with him, J. Vanier was faithful to his mentor’s teaching and practices.

1. Letter from T. Philippe to J. Vanier, spring 1960, APJV.

2. No penetration had not always been the rule (see chapters 2 and 7 of this report which refer to A. de Rosanbo’s abortion). It was mainly for contraception. According to two independent testimonies collected by the commission, another T. Philippe follower practised penetration because he was sterile.

3. See Chapter 6 for correspondence with Mother Marguerite-Marie or “Brigitte”.

4. Letter from J. Vanier to “Brigitte”, 3 June 2006, ADB.

Thomas Philippe’s “erotic madness”

To understand the digressions downward slidespiral of T. Philippe and his followers, starting with J. Vanier, the delusional nature of certain manifestations and conceptions must be analysed. Delusion is defined as an idea that a person commits to unshakeably. “Delusion is not in the theme, it is in the conviction,” said French psychiatrist Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault. Their commitment cannot be corrected despite evidence to the contrary, whether the idea is possible (e.g. followed by a private detective), or impossible (e.g. being in two places at the same time). In the religious context, impossibility refers less to rationality and more to the commonly shared character of belief, which is then considered to be non-delusional. An example of shared non-delusional belief: Jesus rose from the dead. Delusion about religion is possible: this is mystical delusion, in the very wide sense of the term. These ideas are not commonly shared in a particular clinical setting. Delusion is characterised by its acute or chronic character, themes, mechanisms, degree of structure, extension and the degree of associated conviction.

According to the Dominicans, the Holy Office and theologians who have studied T. Philippe’s theses, they are aberrant and indicate mental illness. It is difficult for the psychiatrist to disregard these opinions in the light of the criterion of shared belief mentioned above.

What are these ideas? The key theme, to put it bluntly, is that T. Philippe asserted that Jesus and Mary had intimate sexual relations during their life on earth while waiting to do the same in their celestial life. A woman abused by T. Philippe in the late 1940s testifies:

“He always explained these facts as important graces of Our Lord who wanted to renew in his priest and his little wife the mystery of intimacy that existed between Jesus and Mary (...) He also implied that these relations existed between Jesus and Mary.”¹

M-F Pesneau, who was sexually abused by the two Philippe brothers - Marie-Dominique then Thomas - testifies about the latter: “He described what he had just done to me: these are the same graces that Mary and Jesus lived during their life on earth, very great graces...”²

1. Testimony by M. Brunet, June 1956, III O 59, ADPF.

2. Michèle-France Pesneau, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

T. Philippe's case may seem totally incongruous. He may not have completely surprised psychiatrists in the late 19th century. In his book *La Folie érotique*, published in 1888, French alienist Benjamin Ball wrote this passage in the chapter about erotomania or the "madness of chaste love":

"Queens are worshipped, and one queen transcends all others and had more worshippers than any other: the Virgin, the queen of angels and the empress of heaven. Taking into account the origin of ideas in the mentally disturbed, there is no doubt that many priests worshipped Our Lady ethereally. The devotion that shines through many works by many serious theologians were the effects of unconscious erotomania: an expression of love for a woman veiled by piety, the ardent worship of many virtuous bachelors."¹

T. Philippe was not subject to erotomania as described by Ball, because he was not chaste. His case, however, is described by other forms of erotic madness developed later in the same work. These are pathologies in which "the physical element usurps the predominance, moving to the forefront"². In the hallucinatory form of this disorder, where sexual arousal is central, he speaks of hallucinations affecting the genitals, in some cases reaching orgasm, describing them as follows:

"Such accidents are very common in mental pathology. They are observed in many psychoses: puerperal madness, hysteria, alcoholism, acute or chronic mania. Almost all victims of madness suffer from such events. This delusion alone can occupy the entire pathological field."³

It is probably this kind of delusional sensation, as described by Benjamin Ball, that T. Philippe experienced. His delusion began in 1938 with his "wedding night" with the Virgin Mary at the age of 33, or that is at least when it reached its full extent. His account may correspond to a primary delusional experience, which strongly suggests hallucination:

"On several occasions in Rome in 1938, (Mater Admirabilis, especially Saint M Majeure, also in Saint Peter) I received certain very obscure graces

1. Benjamin Ball, *La Folie érotique*, Paris, J.-B. Baillière et Fils, 1888, p. 34-35.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

which I cannot yet exactly define or classify. There were neither lights nor consolations. They had the same features and effects as the interior graces of tranquillity or union, they were like a divine grip on the body, clearly located in the region of the sexual organs and radiating from there, as from within, on the whole body and soul. I resisted 'these graces' which began every time I began to pray for the first three months. I suffered atrociously. The dilemma was increasingly distressing: either I would be obliged to renounce my inner life linked by God to these graces (with great peril to myself with a very intellectual temperament and a keen sense for modern movements) or indulge in these mysterious graces by entrusting myself to the Blessed Virgin, who seemed to initiate them. After much thought (...) and long consultation with a priest venerated by all for his theological knowledge and contemplative experience¹, after several indications, which seemed providential to me, I received one day (following another consultation with this priest) a grace of very strong light, which was followed by an inner call more intense than ever. After begging the Most Blessed Virgin to remove the devil, if he were the author, I surrendered to her immaculate hands, and gave in to her. My entire body was taken, all night, in extreme contemplation and intimacy with Her."²

This event may have been prepared by the teachings of his uncle Pierre-Thomas Dehau and the "prophecies" of Héléne Claeys-Bouuaert³. J. Vanier spoke of his belief in the discourse of his spiritual father with Antoine Mourges:

"Father Thomas told me about the graces he experienced in 1938 in the small Chapel of Mater Admirabilis in the church of Trinità dei Monte. These graces of union with Mary took over his entire being. I have seen notes by F. Thomas written for his spiritual father, Pierre-Thomas Dehau, where he talks about the hours of prayer (often five to six hours in a row) which took place in inner communion with other people united with him by God. These notes for Pierre-Thomas Dehau reveal that F. Thomas lived deep and intimate experiences with Mary, as though Mary formed his heart and entire being. Mary did not appear to F. Thomas, but lived with and in him in a mystical way. Everything he did was determined by Mary. He did nothing without asking her advice. I dare say he lived like in a marriage

1. His uncle, Pierre-Thomas Dehau.

2. T. Philippe, *Pro-memoria*, 1 March 1956, ACDF, p.3-4.

3. This woman described as mystical and led by Pierre-Thomas Dehau said that "near the Saulchoir a work of God would appear that would be more important than the work of Catherine of Siena". See Chapter 2.

with her. And he wanted everything he experienced internally to be supervised by Pierre-Thomas Dehau.”¹

It seems to have been established that the period when T. Philippe was teaching at the Angelicum left him exhausted, which may have triggered his delusion. But it did not spring fully formed from T. Philippe’s brain. He was prepared by his theological formation, the inspiring and facilitating influence of his Uncle Dehau² with the extreme spiritual nature of his family, the oracles of Hélène Clays-Bouuaert, and the prevalent exacerbated devotion of the Virgin Mary.

Psychiatric diagnoses on Thomas Philippe in 1956

In 1952, T. Philippe’s sexual practices were denounced, leading the Dominican authorities to remove him from L’Eau Vive and make a report to the Holy Office. This seems to have been a turbulent period for the Dominican. F. Paul Philippe of the Holy Office wrote to the Master General of the Dominicans on 15 June: “I dare say that F. Thomas scared me for the first time”³. According to him, F. Thomas had threatened to commit suicide, revealing “a striking march towards schizophrenia and perhaps early dementia”⁴. F. Paul Philippe was not a psychiatrist and therefore unable to precisely apply psychiatric concepts, but his account clearly describes T. Philippe in a psychotic state. More precise observations of the mental state of L’Eau Vive’s founder were not made until four years later.

After the investigation into L’Eau Vive which led to a suspended sentence for “false mysticism” in 1956, the ecclesiastical authorities considered T. Philippe’s mental health to be poor. His defence pleaded psychiatric illness, in precise terms “*una psicosi autonoma, costituita da un complesso delirante appartenente alla varietà mistico-religiosa*

1. Antoine Mourges, *Des «sages et des savants» aux «tout-petits». Aux origines des communautés de L’Arche, 1945-1965*, Thesis for first year of Master’s degree in Religious History supervised by Michel Fourcade, Université Paul Valéry Montpellier III, p. 99-100.

2. Pierre-Thomas Dehau, also a Dominican, was very charismatic. He was accused of having sexual relations with at least three nuns who are also thought to be victims of T. Philippe, Deposition of R1, nun at the Carmel de Nogent-sur-Marne, ACDF.

3. Letter from Father Paul Philippe to Master General Suarez, 15 June 1952, AGOP.

4. *Ibid.*

della paranoia riformatrice”¹. To inspire pity in his judges, T. Philippe concluded his text dated 1 March 1956 with: “[The Church] has never condemned a sick person, though it may be severe regarding their behaviour outside the church.”² This coincided with the line of defence chosen by his lawyer. However, it was completely insincere as T. Philippe never considered himself mentally ill. This is typical of delusional cases due to their absolute conviction³. F. Michael Browne, Master General of the Order of Preachers from 1955 to 1963 wrote about T. Philippe to the *pro-secrétaire* of the Saint Office in a letter dated 8 March 1956: “*Che ci sia qualcosa di disturbato nella sua psiche mi sembra quasi certo*”⁴.

Several specialised psychiatric opinions were issued immediately after the 1956 conviction. They were unanimous regarding serious mental disturbance. The first was requested by the Holy Office, dated 7 May 1956. It is by Canon Géraud, who did not see T. Philippe but referred to documents. He stated:

“1. Father Th. Philippe very probably has a mental illness. 2. He is dangerous which justifies the decision taken by the Supreme Congregation. 3. Isolation in a specialised healthcare facility is recommended.”⁵

In June 1956, Dr. Cossa, a psychiatrist in Nice, made the following report:

“1. It seems there is a basis of paraphilia (sexual deviation) of which the subject was unconscious for a long-time and which appeared later in life. It is recognised that the origin of such neuroses is caused by emotional disturbances at a young age. Quite lengthy analysis would undoubtedly reveal the psychogenetic causes. It will be explained later why this is not recommended.

2. The behavioural anomalies described seem to be due to severe paraphilia.

1. “An autonomous psychosis, forming a mystico-religious type delusion of the reformer paranoia”, Mgr. Virgilio Caselli, 23 April 1956, ACDF

2. Thomas Philippe, *Pro-memoria*, 1 March 1956, ACDF

3. See *infra* note 78.

4. “I am almost certain that his psyche is disturbed.” Original signed letter from P.M. Browne to Cardinal Ottaviani, Rome, 8 March 1956, ACDF.

5. Psychiatric analysis by Canon Géraud, P.S.S., 7 May 1956, ACDF.

3. It is impossible to know whether the mystico-erotic conceptions described to me are a system of defence consciously designed to escape extremely serious accusations or whether they are due to delusion. The person acknowledges their mistakes but denies the doctor the necessary capacity to judge these matters. Their current attitude can be interpreted either way. Very lengthy observation would be necessary to draw a conclusion. It is also possible that such an observation would lead to a very nuanced conclusion, admitting the mixture of a consciously elaborate defence system and delusional conceptions.

[...] In view of these uncertainties, I consider the best solution is to respect Father Thomas's apparent wish that we consider him normal and act accordingly."¹

In mid-July 1956, T. Philippe was admitted to the Frères de Saint-Jean-de-Dieu hospital² in Lyon. Dr. Larrivé examined T. Philippe several times. Father Ducatillon reported his observations to the Holy Office. We are unaware if Dr. Larrivé had access to other information.

"He [Dr. Larrivé] does not think that Father Th.'s case is pathological in the true sense, nor that he can be treated as such. He believes there is a deeper, quasi-structural distortion over which we have no power. The Doctor told me that Father is like someone who has been missing an arm since birth. There is no going back. He believes that his judgement is false and that his intelligence can only address concepts thanks to an excellent memory. (...) It is likely the awakening of the senses occurred late, but with great violence and in a physical and psychological context that made the existing deviations possible. The Doctor questions whether the mystical reasons invoked, and which served to justify certain practices preceded or whether they were fabricated after the event. Moreover, the doctor was exhausted by endless conversations during which Father repeated unconvincing explanations that were unfounded and unworthy of someone truly intelligent. He was also struck by the poor Father's capacity for lying, and this to the point that nothing he said is believable. The Father claims that everything said about him is false, yet justifies his alleged acts with arguments of an internal nature. He accuses the doctor of judging him from the outside only, and hence not understanding anything.

1. Transcript of Dr. Paul Cossa's medical examination of T. Philippe, 18 June 1956, ACDF.

2. T. Philippe wrote about his internment: "In a spirit of obedience, I even considered myself one of them, spending six weeks in a psychiatric hospital." Supplication by F. Thomas Philippe to Pope Paul VI, 2 February 1968, ACDF.

[...] Furthermore, the Doctor believes that Father Th is dangerous and that he will not relinquish any means left to him to start over. For example, he fears that if he is reduced to the secular state, which he still mentions, he would have the freedom to act with no limits. Finally, he believes Father must be kept away from those he has entranced, allowing time to dispel the emotional complex which ensures his hold over some of them."¹

T. Philippe later said this period of isolation and living with mentally ill patients at Saint-Jean-de-Dieu, Longueil-Annel and at the Clermont de l'Oise psychiatric hospital brought him closer to the poor, the sick and the weak, in accordance with the Gospel. He had discovered that it was possible to establish a non-intellectual type of relationship with them that could free them. He understood them better because he shared their condition with their feelings of rejection and humiliation because he was considered insane, despite not considering himself as such. Tempted to stay at the hospital in Clermont de l'Oise, he wrote: "I thought to myself, there are worker-priests, why not patient-priests (.)"²

Characteristics of Thomas Philippe's delusion

The testimonies, especially by T. Philippe himself, and psychiatric opinions cited above are more complementary than contradictory. The resulting hypothesis is chronic delusion, with hallucinatory and imaginative mechanisms, relatively structured around the primary delusional experience of a physical union with the mother of Jesus. The hallucinations seem to have been physical rather than visual, hence affecting the sexual sphere. No testimony mentions auditory hallucinations, but they cannot be excluded, given that the members of the Trinity the Trinity or Mary addressed T. Philippe during his silent prayers, but he does not specify how.

His conviction was complete. T. Philippe never sincerely cast any doubt on his doctrine. It was unquestionable for him. If he seemed to recant several times, for example in his plea to Pope Paul VI on 2 February 1968, it was false repentance intended to attract the good graces of the Vatican and to have sanctions lifted. He was reluctant and,

1. P. Ducatillon to Commissioner of the Holy Office, 29 July 1956, ACDF.

2. Xavier Le Pichon, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

above all deceitful, behaviour typical of delusional people. Despite being aware that his words were difficult for others to accept, except for his “disciples”, he remained unshakeably convinced in his heart and refused to admit their pathological nature. Above all, contrary to his claims, he never stopped the sexual practices justified by his doctrine. He even continued them in a compulsive, almost addictive way, until the end of his life. Sexual impulses were both acted upon and revered sublimated in an outlandish theological explanation constructed as justification.

In his letter to Mgr. S. Desmazières, Bishop of Beauvais, dated 11 March 1977, T. Philippe wrote:

“He [Paul Philippe] has difficulty admitting the explanations of the two psychiatrists who knew me best and who affirm that in the depths of the human consciousness there is a secret that escapes every man, even the psychiatrist, and which falls exclusively to God. After interviews I had with Dr. Thompson, who has seen me live and who trusted me like a friend, he told me: “Ultimately, only you can know the underlying reasons for your actions. It’s a secret between you and God. We can only, from your overall life and apparent results, decide practically whether we can and should trust you, deeply and righteously in our hearts, or not.” I know he still trusted me, just like Dr. Préaut.”¹

In the absence of the Church’s endorsement, he took cover behind two psychiatrist friends who were his unconditional defenders and probably not fully informed². Psychiatrists who consulted with T. Philippe in interviews or examined his file were of the opposite opinion. This was also the case for the Vatican and Dominican Order authorities who judged T. Philippe to be mentally ill at the time of his canonical trial³.

1. Letter from T. Philippe to Mgr. Stéphane Desmazières, 11 March 1977, p. 10, AAI.
2. Dr. Robert Préaut and Dr. John W. Thompson, both close to T. Philippe, wrote warm letters about him without having formally examined him as psychiatrists. The letter from Dr. Préaut, dated 21 December 1953, is addressed to a certain unidentified “Excellency” of the Vatican (doc. 4, Prot. No. 214/52, ACDF). Dr. Thompson’s letter dated 17 March 1956 is addressed to F. Paul Philippe (doc. 43, Prot. No. 214/52, ACDF). They do not comment on T. Philippe’s mental health, but praise his human and spiritual qualities.

3. “Rapport d’Archives. Le cas du Rév. P. Thomas Philippe, O.P.”, ACDF, 2021, p. 43, 45, 47, 49, 51.

There are suggestions of megalomania and persecution. T. Philippe thought he was chosen to announce a new message to the world highlighting the importance of the body. The lowest parts are the most sacred and the bliss they procure is a repetition of hidden events that occurred between Jesus and his mother during their earthly life and announce heavenly happiness. These relations are of the same nature as may have existed between Adam and Eve before the fall. His Uncle Dehau writes in *Joie et Tristesse*:

“It is our life, to us Christians whose destinies are eternal, to those of us that are particularly contemplative, already in this eternity as heaven will be the fullness of what we are and already possess.”¹

T. Philippe believed he was bestowed with an important mission. Jacques Maritain recounted T. Philippe’s ambitions in his notebooks:

“Father spoke to me at length about Father Dehau and the secret soul of L’Eau Vive, a revelation of the contemplative soul that Father Dehau admires so much (...) Father Thomas Philippe sent to Rome by Dehau and this contemplative soul: she told him to speak to the master general, to tell him a work of God would arise near Saulchoir that would be more important than Catherine of Siena’s work. [...] Father Dehau told me about this great work, of the intellectual and spiritual blossoming to come “at the cost of the flower of blood. This soul spoke of the Church’s work (not the Order’s), of a kind of congregation or order dedicated to the Virgin Mary, without any external form or visible constitution but where the spirit would be free. It was this light that encouraged Father Thomas Philippe and urged him to found L’Eau Vive.”²

T. Philippe was convinced he was announcing a new age for the Church. His message was too innovative to be understood, but it would be understood later. This attracted hostility, and, in his view, the disgrace of being considered mentally ill. The “followers” and their master had special privileges and placed themselves above all authority and common morals. The term “*tout petits*” and the focus on the poor, humble and disabled are revelatory of immense megalomania and pride. It was considered a «Work», initiated by Pierre-Thomas Dehau and developed

1. Pierre-Thomas Dehau, *Joie et Tristesse*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1945, p. 128.

2. Jacques Maritain, unpublished personal notebook, AJRM.

by T. Philippe that J. Vanier must pursue. The fear of an endless downward spiral is detected in the documents of the Holy Office and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. For example, in the report by the Father Commissioner during the canonical process of 1956:

“Links with the [T10] are also mentioned. According to [T3], it is suggested she evoked “Work desired by Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin” of which L’Eau Vive was only an episode: the hidden spiritual society of the “small children” of the two Fathers [Dehau and Thomas] which involved union including carnal relations, like those elected in heaven (‘glorious mysteries’). The report accuses J. Vanier and Marie-Dominique Philippe for developing this work.”¹

Despite giving the impression of being an obedient son of the Church and the Dominican hierarchy, T. Philippe only recognised his own authority, having benefited from such private and intimate graces. Anyone who contradicted this was considered an enemy of Mary, and evil. In Mr. Guérout’s testimony during the investigation conducted during the L’Eau Vive case, he stated: “And he claimed to be the only one able to judge the light concerning himself and his mission.”² T. Philippe placed himself on a pedestal, as did his many admirers. He was even thought to have the gift of divination.

Father Jean de Menasce wrote to Father Paul Philippe on 21 May 1952:

“He is only at ease with people who accept him unreservedly and give themselves to him. (...) His philosophical and theological - and naturally spiritual - superiority seemed unquestionable to him (I never saw him recant, recognise the legitimacy of another point of view, or perhaps in his second year of teaching, which is a long way back). He was never effectively controlled by anyone he esteemed above himself. (...) From there forward, his only choice was to decide alone, like the first angel. Repeated statements by his disciples indicate he believed himself to be the custodian of the secrets of the Virgin Mary that could not even be repeated to PD (Dehau).”³

T. Philippe revealed part of this secret in a text written in Lyon in 1956:

1. Father Commissioner’s notes about T. Philippe, 16 April 1956, ACDF.
2. Testimony by Madeleine Guérout, 22 June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.
3. Letter from Father Jean de Menasce to Father Paul Philippe, 21 May 1952, ADPF.

“Love is not expressed in the passing act of generation. It is no longer only at the service of the union of the bodies in one flesh for the transmission of life. (...) those elected thanks to their bodies form a new city, a heavenly Jerusalem (...) occupied at the Wedding, they are true and no longer transient brides, occurring in the night, as though hidden, but permanent and in full eternal light.”¹

And this passage with incestuous content²:

“Did young Jesus, as he grew in love and age, not have increasingly bold gestures of love for Mary (...) that prepared his mother for a new gift with increasingly intimate and free gestures... (...) divinely and imperceptibly accustoming her to becoming his spouse.”³

The last characteristic of this delusion was its restricted reach to a sector of life; it was not all pervasive⁴. It was shared with a limited number of “elected” people, not universal in nature. It was hidden, to use the term omnipresent in this whole affair, because its followers were still aware of its scandalous nature. But common mortals were considered incapable of understanding such “truths” destined to open a new era of faith in the history of salvation.

The Sulpician psychiatrist Mgr. Géraud, who made an initial assessment in 1956 before he became bishop, expressed this limited nature of delusion in his own way⁵. He gave a second assessment in 1974, speaking of “two parallel attitudes with watertight partitions (...), both perfectly structured”⁶.

Finally, the notion of violation of intimacy is enlightening from a phenomenological point of view. T. Philippe’s more or less delusional perceptions related to the intimate sphere, especially the key episode of his wedding night with the Virgin, where he may have experienced a hallucinated orgasm. French psychiatrist Eugène Minkowski saw Clérambault’s generating mechanism of mental automatism in the

1. Text written by T. Philippe in Lyon in 1956, AAI.
2. T. Philippe reportedly had carnal relations with his sister, Cécile Philippe, Prioress of the Dominican Convent of Bouvines (see Chapter 2 of this report).
3. Text written by T. Philippe in Lyon in 1956, p. 149, AAI.
4. In cases of this nature, only part of the psychic life is affected by delusion, other functions being otherwise unharmed; in other cases, delusion gradually pervades the whole psychic life.
5. See *supra* note 73.
6. *Votum* by Mgr. Géraud, P.S.S., 30 August 1974, ACDF.

violation of intimacy, but it can also be applied to delusional states such as the one we describe¹. A form of confusion is perceived without respect for the differences and distance between divine and human beings. T. Philippe, like J. Vanier after him, gave the impression of living intimately with Jesus and Mary, repeating their supposed relations with their victims. Their victims were no longer considered to be people or individuals, but instruments and objects used to carry out these acts. The protagonist identified with Jesus or at least declared to act in communion with him. The Holy Office described T. Philippe as a “false mystic” when justifying his condemnation in 1956, specific to this group where sexual abuse, foreign to Christian traditions, was prevalent.

Psychic and sometimes physical intimacy had no boundaries for J. Vanier, constantly pursuing his objectives and testing their acceptance. There is constant confusion between the internal and external forum of people he accompanied. This notion of intimacy helps to conceptualise the hold exerted on souls and bodies.

Healing in perverse mode

The behaviour of T. Philippe and his followers can also be categorised as perverse. In some cases, sexual abuse is the result of individuals mixing psychosis and perversion, but it is not always easy to separate them. This amalgam was identified by Jacques Maritain in his diary entry on 7 July 1952:

“Charles Journet and F. Paul Philippe [of the Holy Office] are definitively informing me about Father Thomas’s history. In my opinion, it is an extraordinary case of schizophrenia, – an overly rich wine (sincere thirst for piety, etc.) in a false-bottomed wineskin with rot perverting the whole.”²

These perverse traits influenced the way T. Philippe exercised his hold over all his followers, and therefore J. Vanier. He had a strong

1. Eugène Minkowski, *Le Temps vécu*, Collection Quadrige, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1995 (1st ed. Neufchâtel, Delachaux et Niestlé, 1933), p. 205.

2. Jacques Maritain, Personal notebook, unpublished, AJRM.

power of seduction over most of the people he met, and used it with certain women to abuse them.

T. Philippe’s theological reflection commands total submission to the divine personalities, and as a result, total submission by his victims to their representatives: “Jesus loves you through me”. This is a typical argument for cases of sexual abuse in the Christian world. Various testimonies gathered by the Dominican Paul-Dominique Marcovits depict T. Philippe as authoritarian and unconcerned about others, eager to satisfy his impulses, justifying his practices with religious arguments. He deceived the women he abused. They were impressed to have been chosen by this “*Saint homme*” (holy man) who ordered them to say nothing¹.

In Father Ducatillon’s letter to Father Paul Philippe dated 16 June 1956, he explained that T. Philippe assumed Christ’s place among his victims:

“M Huygue saw the sisters [Bouvines] who had been reported to him in the following days. (...) He was impressed by the depth of devastation in some – not only due to the completely reprehensible acts they had been led to commit - but even in those who were not actually accomplices – by the nature of the spiritual guidance they had received from Father Thomas Philippe.(...) It appears that F. Thomas Philippe became his followers’ focus and centre of life. In their eyes, he identified himself with Our Lord himself: after a moment of meditation during confession, for example, he addressed them with familiar language (in French, *tu* rather than *vous*), calling them “his little wives” as if he was Christ. They wanted to identify themselves with Our Lady, the wife - and Mother - of our Lord.”²

The investigation by the Holy Office also suggests T. Philippe’s duplicity and lack of morals. In his correspondence with J. Vanier, he often gave advice to deceive others, advice that J. Vanier strictly respected in his exchanges with the heads of the Dominicans or the Church generally. He addressed his superiors with reverent language to stay in their good graces, to escape their authority, and to continue his fornications. He was referred to as “the subtle pervert” in a document of the

1. “Rapport Marcovits”, 18 March 2015.

2. Letter from Father Vincent Ducatillon to Father Paul Philippe dated 16 June 1956, III O 59, ADPF.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith¹, perhaps as an allusion to “the subtle doctor”, the nickname given to the 13th-century Franciscan theologian Jean Dun Scot. As psychiatrists who examined him pointed out, he was cunning and made unreliable, manipulative remarks, giving his actions religious pretexts.

Misinterpreting Saint Thomas Aquinas, T. Philippe conceived mystical life as being controlled by the Spirit, a passivity, a submission or abandonment to God who models and manipulates human beings who must abandon all reason. He used the expression “prey of love”. It was ideal for ensuring his prey submitted to all his desires, as the representative of the divine, directly informed by silent prayer. The name of the community created by T. Philippe was inspired by the title of the book *Des Fleuves d’Eau Vive*. It was the first book the Dominican gave J. Vanier to read². The author was T. Philippe’s uncle and surrogate father who exerted immense influence on his nephew, the Dominican Pierre-Thomas Dehau. It features this passage which predisposes to all kinds of abuse:

“To enter and remain in the sanctuary of the heart of Jesus, the self must disappear. We must destroy it, exterminate it altogether. (...) If we have the misfortune to look for any answer other than: I obey, we are lost. Asking why is disobeying. The reason for obedience is in itself.”³

The people T. Philippe had sexual relations with were used as instruments and denied existence as people. See the extract of a letter from M.-F. Pesneau à Jean de la Selle:

“They were all vulnerable women, often damaged by life, who were drawn to him as a source of attention and tenderness. On the other side of the coin, he imprisoned them in relationships where everyone lost their sense of self, where there was no freedom – just the opposite of what spiritual guidance should be.”⁴

1. “L’ordination sacerdotale de M. Jean Vanier. *Votum* du Cardinal Paul Philippe”, 9 March 1977, ACDF. p. 8.

2. Antoine Mourges, *op. cit.* p. 206.

3. Pierre-Thomas Dehau, “*Des Fleuves d’Eau Vive*”, Paris: Association de l’Agneau, 1983 (1st ed. Lyon, Editions de l’Abeille, 1941), p. 77.

4. Michèle-France Pesneau, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

The arguments used by T. Philippe to achieve his ends were sometimes bewildering. For example, a woman abused in the early 1950s testified:

“He then lay upon me, and very deftly and skilfully slid his hand under my bodice to grasp my breasts, while praying to T. Ste. V. who had breastfed the Son of God (...) And he said that if I was willing to lend myself to these acts, and if he asked for them in T. Ste.V.’s name, it was to help him make his report to the Congress of Rome on the Assumption.”¹

Another woman abused in the late 1940s tells:

“The Father engaged in all kinds of lubricity with me (...). He made me go up to his room, made me undress, undressed himself, made me lie on his bed and indulged in all sorts of caresses. He experienced real sexual pleasure and asked me many times to drink the semen, telling me to drink like it was the Heart of Our Lord². He never had normal conjugal relations, at least with me. I will not give more details. I have said more than enough.”³

T. Philippe possessed all the characteristics of a sexual pervert: moral transgression, ritualised sexual practice in an imperious and exclusive way to achieve the satisfaction he needed, considering the partner as a mere object to serve his satisfaction, and justifying sexual practices with a higher goal.

Moreover, he did not understand the metaphorical sense of loving vocabulary used by mystics to express their ineffable experience: he took it literally, giving the body a central role, whereas the mystical experience is conceived as purely spiritual and can be achieved only by removing oneself from common sensations⁴. There was also a certain anti-intellectualism, at least he rejected any reasoning and doctrine except his own, and he refused any discussion. His texts are also relatively obscure. His long sermons at Trosly repelled most of the audience who found them unclear.

1. Testimony by M. Guérout, 22 June 1952, III O 59, ADPF.

2. Denis de Rougement cites the Carpocratians sect which forbade procreation but deified sperm, in *L’Amour et l’Occident*, Bibliothèque 10/18, Paris, Plon, 1972 (1st ed. 1939), p.108.

3. Testimony by M. Brunet, III O 59, ADPF.

4. For more on this subject: Henri Bremond, *Histoire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religions jusqu’à nos jours*, T. 2, L’Invasion mystique, Paris, Bloud et Gay Éditeurs, 1916, pp. 585-606. Also Denis de Rougement, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

These considerations shed light on J. Vanier's comments:

"Father Thomas reached me at an infrarational level. What is infrarational? Is it mystical? Was it a meeting with Jesus that finally enlightened everything else? As a result, most theologians bore me because they are on the rational plane, not the infrarational. And I don't really know what infrarational means. But Father Thomas's communication with me was infrarational, communion with him completely clears my vision... I have a very unified vision of the Gospel."¹

T. Philippe was beyond morality and reason, and therefore felt no guilt towards the people he abused. He justified himself, considering he practised a higher order of sexuality and celibacy. In 1977, he wrote to Mgr. Stéphane Desmazières:

"Current theologians often seem to be unaware that since the incarnation of Jesus and his birth of an immaculate virgin, sexuality can and must be approached by Christians on three levels with a triple dimension:

Factually, sexuality is defiled, still marred by the original sin and all current faults.

Morally, it must be purified and rectified from within by virtue; only then can it have true human meaning.

At the divine level, when God with the gift of Wisdom takes it from within, he can use it directly in a divine and hidden way, for the Kingdom, giving virginity a completely new dimension, inspired and finalised by divine love. It is no longer a question of purely human celibacy, which always implies a kind of deprivation, hence requiring some sort of compensation. Rather it is a question of positive virginity, where God himself, from within, assumes everything in us. He gives man new balance and stability from a more plenary and intimate union with the Holy Spirit, and through him with Jesus and Mary."²

Such reflections were strongly echoed by J. Vanier. In his 1984 work, *Homme et femme Il les fit*, he also contrasts genital sexuality with sexuality of "love and celebration"³. This book, like all of J. Vanier's writings

1. Confidential report by A. Mourges, "L'implication de J. Vanier dans le groupe des 'tout petits' du Père T. Philippe (o.p.), 1950-1970", February 2020, p. 33.

2. Letter from T. Philippe to Mgr. S. Desmazières in 1977, p. 27, AAI.

3. J. Vanier, "*Homme et femme Il les fit*": *pour une vie d'amour authentique*, Paris/Montréal, Fleurus/Bellarmin, 1984, p. 179.

and remarks, must be read and can be fully understood from the perspective of T. Philippe's teachings, beyond seemingly orthodox and banal considerations. For example, this typical passage: "Jesus was not an intellectual. He was a simple labourer, the son of a carpenter. His mother remained silently hidden, at the service of the body of Jesus and the mystical body."¹

The complicity between the two men is also noticeable by the way they justified each other. They even abused the same women. For example, Judy Farquharson was the first woman who complained of J. Vanier. When she wanted to talk to T. Philippe about what was happening with J. Vanier, the Dominican gave her several appointments during the day, then invited her to join him in his room late in the evening, after 10pm, to abuse her². Another woman did not consider herself a victim despite the abusive context of her relationship with J. Vanier. When talking to T. Philippe about the relationships she had with J. Vanier, she said that T. Philippe responded "quite evasively (...) that maybe J. Vanier needed it!"³

There are similarities between the testimonies of women who considered themselves abused by J. Vanier and testimonies of women abused by T. Philippe, even if J. Vanier appears to have been less brutal. Their justifications were similar, particularly the assimilation between J. Vanier and Jesus, and between the abused woman and Mary, which results in a description of perplexed submission rather than any agreement and understanding. Judy Farquharson herself testified:

"(...) after having dinner together, we spent the night together. He told me it was a very special union, a mystical union and that I had been called by Jesus. He said (...) that all this was not between us, but rather between 'Jesus and Mary'. He asked me constantly throughout if I understood. I said yes with my head, but I didn't really understand at all."⁴

1. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

2. Interview 90.

3. Interview 51.

4. Interview 90.

Confronted with Judy Farquharson's account about religious justifications by a L'Arche supervisor, J. Vanier replied: "I don't remember."¹ Like T. Philippe, the question is raised as to whether it was delusion or perversion. It can also be observed that the abused women were more or less permeable to this strange theology.

Deluded together

If we consider T. Philippe was delusional, how can we explain all the people who followed his teaching and practices, starting with J. Vanier? Were they also deluded?

The initial description of the "*folie à deux*", of "madness shared by two" was given by Legrand du Saule in 1871², but the most detailed and striking description was given by Lasègue and Falret in 1877³. Now known as shared delusional disorder, there are subclasses and variants. One variant of this type of delusion is induced by one person on another or several others, who are influenced, then delude in turn.

The delusional conviction among T. Philippe's disciples was described in a letter from Father Ducatillon to Father Paul Philippe date 13 June 1956:

"The impression that emerges from the first investigations on behalf of the Holy Office – an impression shared by His Excellency Mgr. Renard and by Mr. Canon Huyghe – is that we are confronted with souls who are ready for any external submission, without the slightest hesitation or resistance, but who will be very difficult to convince internally. They seem to have taken refuge in an inaccessible zone of defence. They offer no external resistance, but nor is there any indication that they really acknowledge or regret their errors. They are strangely serene and sure of themselves."⁴

1. Interview 12.

2. Henri Legrand du Saule, *Le Délire des persecutions*, Paris, Plon, 1871, p. 217-278.

3. Charles Lasègue and Jules Falret, "La folie à deux ou folie communiquée", *Archives générales de médecine*, September 1877, pp. 257-297.

4. Letter from Father Ducatillon to Father Paul Philippe, 13 June 1956, III O 59, ADPF.

Father Paul Philippe responded:

"I am, like you, astonished by the reaction of Father Thomas's intimate disciples. In front of each name, you are almost invariably obliged to note: "She recognised without difficulty that the decisions were founded, she didn't want any explanation", etc. This attitude is so similar to Father Thomas's attitude that I tremble at the thought that these poor girls might remain attached to him internally."¹

It is not certain that these remarks apply directly to J. Vanier, but he seemed totally submissive to T. Philippe during those years, never resisting his influence. To do so, he had to disobey the 1956 Holy Office sanction by continuing to see T. Philippe secretly and by participating in the recreation of the small L'Eau Vive group at Trosly².

The Holy Office recognised the connection between J. Vanier and T. Philippe, speaking of fanaticism³. Pope John XXIII himself asked J. Vanier to "leave" T. Philippe:

"During a private audience with the Vanier parents and their son Jean in Pope John XXIII's private apartments in July 1959, the Pope, alone with Jean in the elevator, told him, "You must leave Father Thomas". Jean recounts that he left with a wounded heart, but internally peaceful: "I knew I was too tied by Jesus to Father Thomas to be able to leave him. For me, Father Thomas was a presence of Jesus. To leave it would be unfaithful to Jesus and what he wanted from me."⁴

This attachment to T. Philippe was the prevailing argument in the refusal to J. Vanier's request to become a priest⁵.

Participation in T. Philippe's delusion can be confirmed by J. Vanier's intimate writings and some of his public writings which are marked by T. Philippe's reflection despite being apparently orthodox. This shared delusion is also confirmed by J. Vanier's sexual behaviour, modelled on

1. Letter from Father Paul Philippe to Father Ducatillon, 2 July 1956, III O 59, ADPF.

2. See Chapter 7.

3. See *supra* note 30.

4. Antoine Mourges, *Des «sages et des savants» aux «tout-petits». Aux origines des communautés de L'Arche, 1945-1965*, Thesis for first year of Master's degree in Religious History supervised by Michel Fourcade, Université Paul Valéry Montpellier III, p 347.

5. See Chapter 3.

T. Philippe's behaviour and tainted with the same delusional and manipulative tendencies. More generally, J. Vanier retained certain aspects of T. Philippe's delusion and perversity, particularly physical aspects. Otherwise, he developed a more personal work in his writings and actions, but the shadow of T. Philippe hovered over him constantly.

One of the characteristics of induced delusion is the disappearance of delusion when the inducing agent is removed. This was not observed in J. Vanier who never escaped the hold of T. Philippe, to whom he was faithful until his death.

A narcissistic perverse nucleus within the Catholic Church

T. Philippe had wide influence on founders of religious movements¹. Several communities founded since the 1970s and led by people who had been spiritually guided or influenced by T. Philippe were known for sexual abuse. They include the Saint-Jean community, founded in 1974 by T. Philippe's brother, Marie-Dominique Philippe, who was also convicted in 1956. Not to mention Ephraïm, founder of the Béatitudes, who said T. Philippe approved sexual abuse. Thierry de Roucy, at the origin of the non-governmental organisation Points-Coeur was also influenced by T. Philippe. He was reduced to a secular state in 2018 due to sexual abuse and abuse of power. Abuse spread much more easily in religious communities than L'Arche, where it was limited due to a different vocation, inspiration and operating system.

All these facts are reminiscent of Paul-Claude Racamier's work on narcissistic pervert nuclei with varying degrees of far-reaching toxic effects. He establishes their similarity with shared delusion disorder between two people, but which can also be applied to larger groups. He wrote:

“One (more) area where psychosis and perversity converge is in shared delusion disorder between two people. (...) It is traditionally known that partners of shared delusional disorder have different positions: one is active and dominant, the other is docile and dominated. One has delusional

1. For more on this subject : Céline Hoyeau, “L'influence des frères Philippe sur les communautés nouvelles”, *La Croix*, 22 February 2021.

energy, the other is more complacent. One hallucinates, delusional by necessity and convincing through need; the other interprets and is convinced out of interest. Primary benefits of delusion prevail in the first, whereas the benefits are secondary for the other. (...) These various modalities are all evocative of the perverse nucleus. There is one essential difference. The delusional duo appears less manipulative than the perverse nucleus as we have described it: the duo is self-sufficient, not seeking to nourish itself at the expense of others like the perverse nucleus. (...) It is, however, very likely that intermediate configurations exist between these similar organisations which are related in many ways.”¹

Observations of the case of T. Philippe and his followers suggests an intermediate configuration featuring characteristics attributed by Racamier to the perverse nucleus, different to shared delusion between two people. Some of Racamier's remarks on narcissistic perversion and the perverse nucleus might apply to T. Philippe, and to J. Vanier to a lesser extent², such as:

“As can be expected, the pervert is not truly conscious of the perverse character of their conduct. Nor is there any internal censorship expressed by a superego: the pervert is only disappointed if they fail, and only abstains if the environment is not conducive. Such a man or woman walks on the feet of others, but only if they expose themselves and as long as they expose themselves: once the pervert's prey denounces the “scheme”, they withdraw. A sufficiently gifted pervert's “radar” detects when a prey is aware of the situation and gives up. As soon as a genuine pervert senses they are unmasked, they abandon their prey, out of opportunism rather than out of conscience. He or she can hurt, wound, embarrass, humiliate: their priority is to limit their own personal suffering, to the extreme, ideally avoiding it completely.”³

He adds: “In any case, the truth has no importance for a narcissistic pervert. All masks and false pretences, covered with varnish, they don't

1. Paul-Claude Racamier, *Les Perversions narcissiques*, Paris, Payot, 2012, p. 121-122.

2. Whether J. Vanier's personality was structured by perversion is a valid question, but certainty is impossible. Hypotheses tend towards a form of borderline personality, as indicated *supra* note 22, but mixed forms may exist. This notion of perversity is also referred to in the document of the doctrinal commission of the Bishops' Conference of France “L'arbre et ses fruits. Trouble ecclésial lié à la fécondité spirituelle des personnalités perverses”, which may allude to T. Philippe and J. Vanier.

3. Paul-Claude Racamier, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

care about the truth: appearances are less demanding and more advantageous.”²¹

Racamier writes about how the perverse nucleus is organised:

“As a group or family, the perverse nucleus is an organised, active and sustainable dynamic configuration. The perverse character of a nucleus is defined by the personalities who compose it and its mode of operation, which is characterised by secrecy and predation; the transgression of common rules and the discredit of the truth.”²²

He also explains:

“A perverse nucleus is based on a kind of delusion: a delusion of grandeur that does not appear deluded from outside. The feelings of omnipotence and invulnerability that drive leaders of a perverse nucleus are much more than a fantasy: they are an intimate conviction - unreasonable, unshakeable, delusional. The essence may be delusional, but the modalities of pragmatic application are precise and adjusted socially (...). After all, perhaps the manoeuvres of a perverse nucleus are simply the actions - socially quite skilful - of a delusional duo or trio?”²³

Given the many people who suffered from T. Philippe’s spiritual and sexual abuse, directly or indirectly via followers who shared his delusion and reproduced his actions, and in the first instance his brother Marie-Dominique and J. Vanier, this can be described as a perverse toxic nucleus within the Catholic Church. The photograph of these three men received by Pope John-Paul II speaks volumes about their ability to infiltrate, seduce and deceive, whereas the Vatican was supposed to be aware. It also speaks volumes about the dysfunctions of the ecclesiastical institution.

The same question applies to L’Arche and the possible toxic role of its founders. The existence of shared delusion is quite clear and constitutes a plausible diagnostic hypothesis. The social skills were real, but this did not explain the success of L’Arche, because the “delusion” was reserved to a limited group and only affected a certain sector of their personality. The work accomplished in all the communities moved away from early

1. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 86

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

practices. Practices at L’Arche became more professional and secular than at Val Fleury and the very first homes opened in Trosly.

Despite observed signs of Racamier’s perverse nucleus, there is little evidence that its toxicity deeply infiltrated L’Arche. This is probably because it was not a closed environment, which is often the case for congregations, and that the many communities that developed were led with great autonomy. Also, many different assistants arrived quickly and from all over the world with no control over their profiles and the doctrine was not motivated by proselytism. The revelations about J. Vanier seem to have disturbed L’Arche more than its founders’ hidden lives. The events revealed in 2020 seemed unthinkable and the devastation was boundless. J. Vanier’s admirers felt denial, anger, sadness, or a sense of betrayal.

Conclusion

“If I am ever asked how to deal with a nucleus in a healthcare institution given the damage they cause, my answer is simply: remove it. Which essentially consists of finding the truth and revealing it,” writes Racamier¹. The above psychiatric considerations do not claim to reach the truth. Their sole purpose is to provide food for thought, to draw attention to certain points that evoke a detectable - and if possible - instructive psychopathological mechanism. Focus was given to certain areas of interest to the specialist that are not necessarily the most visible to non-specialists. It is therefore a professionally informed view, and may be distorted. Nevertheless, these observations provide information, which must be considered as hypotheses. Questions remain about how plausible and representative they are, as other psychopathological hypotheses are possible. However, all the facts firmly established about T. Philippe and J. Vanier leave little doubt there was mental disturbance.

There is also little doubt that J. Vanier deliberately exercised hold over adult women whom he sexually abused. He was probably under T. Philippe’s hold himself, subjected to a powerful influence from which he never seems to have escaped.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

He reproduced the sexual behaviours inherent in the Dominican's doctrine, albeit in a less brutal manner. His master's delusions, which can be specifically described as Marian-sexual, had probably the greatest impact on his spiritual life. He belonged to the group of followers who shared this delusion mixed with perversity. His loyalty to T. Philippe's ideas, which he tried to conceal, never faltered. He gives the impression of having acted slyly and hypocritically, in particular to establish and maintain his reputation. He was keen to project an image of spiritual master and saint, while engaging in acts contrary to the Catholic Church's teachings and decisions. It is more than likely he was driven by pseudo-mystical motives.

This was indeed an essential and structuring part of J. Vanier's life - but it was only a part. As head of L'Arche, he developed actions with quantified benefits for people with disabilities. To use a Buddhist symbol: a flower grew out of the mud - or more precisely - despite the mud.

PART 6

Observations by a psychoanalyst

Translation : *Caroline Lefour*

CHAPTER 20.
The dangers of an unrecognised solitude

Nicole Jeammet

How can J. Vanier's trajectory be explained? To answer this apparently simple question, it is important to begin by specifying the angle of interpretation adopted in this study. My psychoanalytic approach follows S. Freud's theory, and is complemented by Donald W. Winnicott's theory (1896-1971). Winnicott was a paediatrician before becoming a psychoanalyst. He shed light on the importance of environmental impact and of no longer exclusively considering how a person interiorises their early relational experiences. He said:

“I once said: “there is no such thing as an infant” meaning, of course, that wherever one finds an infant one finds maternal care, and without maternal care there would be no infant.”¹

My approach is also the result of my personal experience as a psychotherapist working with mothers and children at Professor Michel Soulé's Centre de Guidance, boulevard Brune in Paris; as a professor of child psychopathology at Université Paris 5 René Descartes; and my research and publications in intergenerational studies and interrelatedness more generally².

1. Donald W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*,
2. For example, see Nicole Jeammet, *La haine nécessaire*, PUF, 1989; *Le célibat pour Dieu*, Cerf, 2009; *Les violences morales*, Odile Jacob, 2001; *Amour, sexualité, tendresse : la réconciliation ?*, Odile Jacob, 2005; *Entre toi et moi, la découverte des possibles*, Odile Jacob, 2015.

J. Vanier had just died. At the time, his reputation was saintly. Just some months after his death, a significant and buried part of his life was uncovered. This advocate of celibacy at L'Arche had sexual relations with several women, six of whom planned to testify. The devastation resulting from such unthinkable events was boundless. How could such a charismatic man, so inhabited by the Word of God; a man who was so compassionate and tender with people with a disability, who wanted to "reveal his own beauty to others" (and who sometimes did) be incapable of empathy for the women he secretly seduced?

A detour through his intergenerational and interrelational history is required to understand the total contrast between his two facets. His childhood is especially relevant. Childhood relationships are key for each one of us. As Winnicott put it: "When I look, I am seen, so I exist." Was I looked upon with tenderness? Did I feel my arrival caused pleasure? If so, I will be able to trust. Or on the other hand, did I feel I didn't exist for those who took care of me? In which case, how can I feel anything but fear and mistrust towards others? Clearly, such emotional impact is particularly decisive during the first years of life, even if each subsequent meeting brings potential for change.

This approach is even more relevant given that J. Vanier's "mentor" – who could even be described as his "guru" – was T. Philippe. He drew on his own interpretation of the mother-child relationship¹ to justify his "mystical" conception of the relationship between men and women. Now that J. Vanier and his parents and grandparents are dead, the only remaining sources for analysis are published books (see the end of this section), correspondence, and written and oral testimonies by people who knew them. To make this analysis even more complicated, J. Vanier erected a wall of silence around his childhood memories.

1. T. Philippe, *La vie cachée de Marie*, 1959 (written), 1977 (first publication by La ferme diffusion), 1988 new edition : page numbers cited herein.

Significant details about Georges Vanier's history

Georges, the eldest of five children, was born in Quebec on 23 April 1888. His father is described as taciturn and suffering from "an inferiority complex". His mother as "very ambitious for her children". The family was Catholic with a Jansenist influence. Religion was steeped in fear, the danger of sin, and a preoccupation for excellence and perfection¹. For example, when Georges left for the war in France, he had a list in his pocket featuring severe exhortations which ended in a terrifying description of hell:

"If I commit mortal sin, I will be thrown into hell forever for millions of years, as long as there are grains of sand in the sea and when that many years have passed, my torments will begin again."

As a child he was rejected and bullied by other children his age, which inevitably left a mark:

"At the age of nine he enters college, he is always very elegantly dressed, but there is a long stretch to go from home to school, and he has to make his way through a barrier of rotten eggs and ripe tomatoes that the other kids in the neighbourhood throw at him."²

Is this why he became so solitary and reserved?³ He loved boxing, and was passionate about hockey, and about victories. He left the Loyola college run by the Jesuits in 1906. He went on a retreat but was still unsure of his vocation. There is little information about his life between 1906 and 1908, except that he suffered from bouts of depression. Father Gaume⁴, one of the few teachers he stayed in contact with reproached

1. Pauline made the following judgement about her husband's spirituality: "He considered every Christian must strive for personal holiness and have the supreme ambition of self-control and unreserved obedience", quoted in D. et G. Cowley, *Portrait de Pauline Vanier*, 1994, p. 50.

2. See Robert Speaight, *Georges P. Vanier soldat diplomate, gouverneur général*, 1972 by Robert Speaight.

3. R. Speaight, *op. cit.*, p. 17: "G. Vanier was a very good companion but he never had close friends of his own age." A typical example: in September 1917, he complained of "feeling very lonely" during his 12-day leave". R. Speaight, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

4. Father Gaume was a French Jesuit who, according to R. Speaight, *op. cit.*, p. 19, contributed to George's decision to become French Canadian. In search of his identity, Georges Vanier had learnt that many generations of his ancestors were French. He decided to seriously study French as a result of his friendship with the priest.

him for his lack of empathy. He was ill in 1910, but apparently his condition didn't interfere with his studies, as he graduated with a law degree in 1911. He socialised with the poet Paul Morin. According to their correspondence, Georges still suffered from "nervous depression".

The declaration of war on 1 August 1914 changed the course of his life. Having French ancestors gave him the cause he had been looking for since he discovered his lack of religious vocation. After several months of training, his regiment was sent to war. He wrote to his mother:

"It is a privilege...to be this old and instead of mediocre lives in search of dollars and mud, we can reach for principles and the stars. We have been focusing on the earth for so long, we forgot the stars are still shining."

It seems he had two extremes: idealisation with denial of any fear which counterbalanced his deep personal insecurity.

All the letters to his mother, some to his father, and his diary entries between 1915 and 1919 are very interesting in this regard¹. There was abundant correspondence from both sides, but his mother's letters are no longer available. Surprisingly, there was absolutely no mention of the members of his entourage. He never mentioned friends, neither male nor female. His letters contained factual descriptions of landscapes and events that always ended with an ideal vision of the world. For example, in his letter dated 30 September 1915, he wrote about leaving the trenches and about the training he had had, and about how they hoped to push back the border with help from the French. The letter concludes with a totally idealised picture of the French:

"The French are splendid: their enthusiasm and determination are amazing, and I want to salute every man and woman I meet from the most valiant and courageous nation in the world." etc.

A short passage in a letter dated 1 January 1916 points to the lack of importance he gave to relationships. He wrote about his sister's wedding, saying that of course he would have liked to be there but frankly he preferred to be there in thought rather than in person. Being a war hero was more important than being with his sister. Two months later,

1. See Deborah Cowley, *Georges Vanier Soldier – The Wartime Letters and Diaries 1915-1919*, 2000.

he wrote that he slept on a piece of the wedding cake for three nights but that he didn't dream of anything or anyone, which probably meant he would remain single forever¹.

Last but not least was his strong desire to reflect a perfect image of himself which corresponds to his desire for heroism. In his letters, he expressed six times his concern about appearing "handsome" in the photos. He requested that photos where he saw himself as ugly or too fat, or where he said that he looked like a cat with half-closed eyes, be destroyed (31 June 1916).

In 1916, a shell exploded near him. He suffered from severe shock and was transferred to a hospital for convalescents. Of course, he tried to reassure his parents, but his diary entries mentioned depression and sleepless nights. His parents tried to have him brought back home. When they obtained permission to do so, he wrote to them: "I can't return to Canada now," repeating his aspiration for an ideal cause as justification. This echoes a phrase by Claudel he liked to quote: "Youth was not made for pleasure, but for heroism."² While leading his battalion on 28 August 1918, a bullet hit his right side and he lost a leg. He wrote to his mother: "The loss of my leg doesn't affect me in the least."

Significant details of Pauline Vanier's history

Anxiety and depression seem to have been transmitted through the Vanier family from grandmother Thérèse who lost her mother when she was three and her father when she was nine.³ Both Pauline and Jean's mothers suffered from severe depression. Pauline was an only daughter, born in Montreal in 1898. Apparently her father, Charles Archer, an

1. This ritual entails sleeping with a piece of wedding cake under the pillow to dream of a possible future marriage and maybe even the identity of the partner.

2. R. Speaight, *op. cit.*, p. 404.

3. Note this is not a historian's account. I develop the psychological, emotional and interrelated aspects of these characters. See Mary-Frances Coady, *Georges and Pauline Vanier. Portrait of a couple*, 2011. Mary-Frances Coady, *Mercy within Mercy. Georges and Pauline Vanier and the Search for God*, 2015. Deborah et George Cowley, *Portrait de Pauline Vanier*, 1994. Deborah Cowley, *Georges Vanier Soldier – The Wartime Letters and Diaries 1915-1919*, 2000. Robert Speaight, *Georges P. Vanier soldat, diplomate, gouverneur général*, 1972.

eminent lawyer, had a difficult life - though “he exhausted himself working”, yet he was never “fully accepted by either the English or French Canadians”. A rough man, he liked sports but was not particularly attracted to literature or religion. Note that he and his wife had separate bedrooms, which may explain the fact they only had one child.

Pauline was raised as a solitary little princess and, surprisingly, aged 11, she was taken out of the school she had attended for two and a half years. As a result, she suffered from lifelong insecurity and a lack of self-confidence. She never invited friends to her home, believing she was unable to entertain them. It is important to note that she felt an intense attraction to religion. Under the influence of Father Pichon, she received a message from a loving God that totally contrasted with her husband’s – at least initial – Jansenist belief. She considered a religious vocation. Her mother took her with her when she went to do the weekly shopping for a poor, sick woman, thus showing her how to care for the underprivileged. Aged 19 she “dreamt of independence” and secretly enrolled in a nursing course. On learning this, her mother was very negative, whereas her father was in fact proud of her. Her son Jean did exactly the same thing years later when he left for the navy aged 13.

In Deborah and George Cowley’s book, she described herself as shy and insecure, saying that “she attracted attention to herself in the stupidest way possible”¹, repeatedly committing blunders which is recurrent in the stories of her life. She added how much she liked to give but not to receive.

The incredible meeting of Pauline and Georges Vanier

Pauline met Georges, after a friend had mentioned him in the most glowing terms, a few days before her parents took her to France². He invited her to lunch and made her a small present: the military maps featuring the battlefields where he had fought! Surprisingly, she described herself as “very moved”, and hoped he would contact her before

1. Deborah et George Cowley, *Portrait de Pauline Vanier*, 1994, p. 23.

2. My main source for these events is the book by D. et G. Cowley, *Portrait de Pauline Vanier*, *op. cit.*

her departure. But, no news, no visits, no messages. In fact, it turns out he had sent a bouquet of flowers but to the wrong ship! She was desperate and told herself “she would show him who she is”. True to her word, three months after arriving in France, she got engaged to a handsome French officer, who by curious coincidence, had lost, not a leg, but an arm during the war. Yet, this “vindictive” engagement plunged her into deep despair. She said she went to Mass every morning to ask the Lord “to do anything to get her out of the trap”. She finally found the courage to break the engagement four months later. Her ex-fiancé made a terrible scene and disappeared for several days, leaving her to believe he had committed suicide (fortunately this was not the case)¹.

The following year, in 1920, Pauline and her parents returned to Canada. She met a lawyer, one of Georges’ colleagues, who suggested they write a postcard to him. Georges replied that he would be happy to see her in Quebec again, where he had joined the army. “It was Providence, that’s why I believe in Providence.”² And so they met again, and started going for carriage rides and dining together. Pauline waited desperately for him to propose. And finally got him to do so when she announced she was returning to Montreal the next day! To celebrate their engagement, he offered her a small bottle containing mud from the boot of his amputated leg!

Interestingly, years later, Pauline said about him with some exasperation:

“This hero of the Great War had no clue about how to woo a young woman. He tried a regimental approach, inviting me to lunch then to tea, again to lunch and again to tea. He talked to me about the latest book on philosophy by Bergson, which he had read. Oh dear, dear, dear, dear!”³

They married and left for England where Pauline had trouble fitting in. She was soon pregnant with their first daughter, Thérèse Marie Cherisy, named after the place where Georges lost his leg. She then

1. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

2. I quote this because the theme of Providence is a recurring theme in written records left by the Vanier family.

3. Mary-Frances Coady, *Georges and Pauline Vanier: Portrait of a couple*, 2011, p. 60.

gave birth to two sons, first Byngsie, then Bernard in 1927. The same summer, a fire broke out in their rented holiday house. They escaped disaster, but everything in the house was destroyed. This event undoubtedly triggered Pauline's serious existential problems. She suffered from constant headaches and depression which she says lasted seven years. It was under these conditions that their fourth child, Jean, was born on 10 September 1928.

An anxiogenic family and environment

To set the scene, this quote describes how challenging Pauline found her role as a mother:

“Pauline, an only child lacking experience with babies, did not take easily to motherhood, in spite of the sincere desires she had poured into her journal. She was in awe of the tiny human being she had brought into the world and felt helpless in the face of the squalling, needy infant. She marvelled at Nanny Thompson's effortless approach and common sense.”¹

For example, one story tells how “she had Byngsie across her knee and was about to administer a spanking with the hairbrush, when she burst into tears instead”². It seems she was incapable of handling aggression. She could only allow herself to be “good” and “filled with wonder”, turning her aggression against herself, crying as if she were the guilty party.

It's striking how full of contradiction she was. For example, she was very fond of children, never missing an opportunity to hug them. (and yet she was unable to show her own children such affection!) There is an anecdote about how she was once late for an important reception in Paris. Coming out of a shop, she found a group of children gathered around the embassy's limousine. “Without a second's hesitation, I took the whole troop for a little ride,” she said. “We had so much fun, I completely lost track of the time!”

1. See Mary-Frances Coady, *Georges and Pauline Vanier. Portrait of a couple*, 2011, p. 73

2. *Ibid*, p.104

About this, Father Coady wrote:

“When Pauline met someone in trouble, she found the courage and strength to help them, strength she lacked for herself.” (*op. cit.*, p. 112).

She was somewhat impulsive and unpredictable, which seems to be linked to an uncontrollable need to prove her generosity and kindness to others. Was this her way of escaping loneliness and reassuring herself of her own worth? She also invested herself in charitable activities during and after the war, as discussed further below.

Added to this serious maternal depression, two events occurred during Georges' appointment in Geneva: the adverse conditions of the global economic crisis and the sudden loss of part of his savings in the 1929 stock market crash. At the time, Pauline wrote:

“Unfortunately, my condition in Geneva worsened more than it improved. I lost 20 pounds. I became a bit paranoid. I was afraid of everyone.”¹

Jean was born into this context in 1928. His Scottish nanny gave him his nickname «Jock». In 1931, they left Geneva to return to London, but apparently Pauline's deep depression persisted. Georges was still indebted to the banks, and on some days she was unable to leave her room. She was overwrought, and couldn't bear the idea of sending her children to boarding school. Yet another contradiction: she couldn't take care of her children, but she didn't want to be separated from them either. The fear of separation is a frequently recurring theme throughout her life. For example, she was pregnant with Thérèse when her husband's departure was announced but despite being advised to rest, she insisted on accompanying him. Separation seemed to represent a loss to her. She expressed this in a letter to Georges when he left for Geneva, leaving her in London. Due to increasingly frequent episodes of alternating excitement and depression, Dr. Cassidy was consulted and prescribed three weeks' rest:

“Mon petit, mon petit, if you knew how much I love you and how much I need you. I'm feeling absolutely helpless without you and there's a horrible emptiness around me.”²

1. D. et G. Cowley, *Portrait de Pauline Vanier*; *op. cit.*, p. 41.

2. Mary-Frances Coady, *Georges and Pauline Vanier. Portrait of a couple*, 2011, p. 95.

During the same period, she also allowed herself to express frustration in addition to her passionate love: "Write me real letters, not summaries of your days." She talked about «cracking the armour» imprisoning Georges.

As shown above, Pauline was unable to interact with her children. Unfortunately, this was also the case for Georges who had an obsessive temperament. For instance, he was capable of rewriting the same text twenty times. "Imprisoned in his armour" described Georges perfectly. Books written about Georges feature only three passages where he "played" with his children. In the first, he gave them a pin and they played at piercing his artificial leg. In another, he gave them shaving cream and razor blades (something he also did later with his granddaughter Laurence), marvelling each time how they didn't cut themselves! The last instance took place in a Paris hotel: "At the hotel, I had to play with them from 6.00a.m. to 8.00a.m. to avoid angering the occupants in neighbouring rooms. At 8:00a.m., I assumed everyone would be awake, so I told them: "Now yell all you like."¹ He was not interested in the children or having fun with them but wanted to project an irreproachable image of the family.

Jean's nanny also influenced his life, if only because she gave him his nickname "Jock". Unfortunately, there is only one short passage written about her:

"Georges called him "Jock" as a sign of friendship for the Scottish nanny. The name lives on today. "Nanny" gave Jean, who she called "my little Jock", his bath until he was nine years old."²

In an interview on 17 September 2013, Jean Vanier made a rare reference to his childhood: "She saved me, I loved her more than my mother." Years later, when he was in the Navy, Jock took Nanny to the cinema. She said to the tall, young man: "Jock, darling, give me your hand to cross the street." This enduring bond suggests that a certain attachment existed between them, giving Jean the memory that positive relationships were possible. Despite a persistent relational vacuum, he was clearly able to demonstrate tenderness, unlike T. Philippe.

1. R. Speaight, *op. cit.*, p. 419

2. *Idem*, p. 43

In any case, the lack of affection shown by his parents particularly affected little Jean. When he was three years old, he screamed at his mother: "*I hate you! I'm going to kill you.*"¹ He buried these feelings of hatred, rejection and rage deeply, clinging to an ideal he found in religion, like his parents.

Georges was transferred to Paris in December 1938. During that period, Byngsie fell seriously ill in London and nearly died. He survived, which Pauline interpreted as a "little miracle". "From that day forward, Georges and I were convinced that Byngsie would receive a special vocation from God." This was indeed the case and he later became a Trappist monk. This very important aspect of the family life is shown in many ways. There are many examples in the book written by D. and G. Cowley. In May 1940, the family was on their way back to Paris when Jock caught a serious ear infection. It was impossible to find a doctor as they were all requisitioned by the army. "But *Providence was watching over us*. A doctor fleeing Paris stopped to ask for directions. He agreed to drain Jock's ear." A little later, near Poitiers, they ran out of fuel, but all the petrol stations were dry. "I asked the children to take out their rosaries and pray. After a good ten minutes, a man appeared at the door of a service station and finally said he would give us his last jerry can of fuel."

In September 1937, after a summer in Montreal with their parents, Bernard and Jean returned to London to join their older brother at St. John. In their year-end reports, Bernard was praised for his work, while Jean was criticised for being slow and for having difficulty expressing himself clearly. He was described as "a boisterous and fidgety child, erratic and untidy and lacking in concentration (...) Jock is small for his age (nine) and has less stamina than the other two boys."²

In summer 1939, all diplomats were asked to leave Paris. The Vanier family moved to a castle in the Loir et Cher area where the atmosphere was dreadful. The housekeeper disliked the children and accused them of stealing. One day Jean discovered a calf strangled in the stable. He told the gardener, who accused him of the act³. In July 1941, little Michel was born. Pauline was 43 years old at the time and received

1. See Mary-Frances Coady, *Georges and Pauline Vanier: Portrait of a couple*, 2011, p. 104.

2. Mary-Frances Coady, *Georges and Pauline Vanier: Portrait of a couple*, 2011, p. 118.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

strong criticism from those around her. “Several of my old friends criticised me bitterly – not for having a child at 43, but for having done what it took to have a child at my age!”¹ It was a sign she had no morals!²

It is also important to note the toxic context that year with Europe at war. The Vanier family tried to explain the threat of a possible German victory and the importance of supporting Europe in the war. Certain segments of the Canadian population saw the war as an inconvenience that subjected them to rationing and, even worse, the fear that their sons could be enlisted. The Vaniers were completely rejected as a result. For example, when Pauline was to give a lecture, she was presented as “the great simulator”:

“There was deep antipathy towards us. We began receiving threats by letter and phone. There were even unfounded accusations in the newspapers about our personal lives, even about our children.”³

That same year, when he was just thirteen, J. Vanier told his father he wanted to enlist in the navy. We will return to this subject, but his idea to enlist showed his alliance with his parents’ ideals, especially paternal heroism. In any case, it was an opportunity for him to meet his father and receive his approval: “I trust you. If you think you should do it, do it.” he said to him. J. Vanier talked about this scene often: “His confidence in me gave me self-confidence, confidence in my intuitions. He gave me life for the second time.”⁴ On the other hand, it should be noted that his mother was very unhappy about his departure, demonstrating her strong maternal attachment.

The importance of early relational experiences

It is important at this stage to clarify the theory about the importance of early relational experiences⁵ and about what it means to be a “good

1. D. et G. Cowley, *Portrait de Pauline Vanier*, p. 85.

2. Note that sexual pleasure was considered immoral by Catholics and to what degree J. Vanier was convinced of this.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

4. Marie-Hélène Mathieu, with J. Vanier, *Plus jamais seuls! : l’aventure de Foi et lumière*, 2011, p. 180.

5. For more information, see chapter 3: La relation mère-enfant : creuset de l’amour. of our book *La haine nécessaire*, Paris, PUF, coll. Le fait psychanalytique, 1998.

enough mother”¹– that is, one who gives her child the best chance of developing their identity.

Initially, babies are only conscious of their own feelings in a two-sided world, where their *me* is a feeling of pleasure, completely ignoring the person delivering it. They push displeasure away, assimilating it with the other. Good is *me*, what makes *me* feel good. Bad is the other, that I see as a threat (we have here the seed of many forms of racism). It is the first dichotomy that persists in some people.

Who am I? And who is the other? From the outset, the problem is not agreement or even reciprocity between me and the other. The first problem is their progressive differentiation, that begins in a founding experience of complete entanglement and confusion between me and the other, where relations are experienced as passive dependence and need, inevitably generating hatred and rejection, and therefore fear of the other. The next question is: how to disentangle the personal self from the other without losing them and being lost with them?

Potential for trusting the mother reconciles irreconcilable pleasure and displeasure, me and the other.

The more reliable the mother is, the more she shares the pleasure of exchange through looks, touching, and talking, and the more confidence gradually develops. The more a mother gives the infant experiences to show them that they can foresee and anticipate their behaviour, the more the infant accepts experiences of frustration and expectation and therefore of displeasure. This makes it possible for the child to confidently envisage an imminent return of pleasure, perpetuating the essential feeling of continuity with their personal self. Relational continuity develops the child’s continuity. The presence of a third party, the father, is essential for avoiding this continuity becoming fusional. A three-body relationship is essential to learn how to be in a two-body relationship and build personal boundaries. The paradox is that continuity can only be created with discontinuity.

The capacity to trust is vital. But there is another paradox: I don’t decide to trust alone. Intelligence can be developed through the

1. Winnicott’s expression when referring to the toxic effect of a mother trying to be perfect.

acquisition of knowledge, but trust requires a secure attachment to a person who has proven to be reliable in a relationship. Every individual life begins on a horizon of “alliance” with another who initiates, or not, this taste and pleasure for relations, for sharing. Some mothers have good intentions but are emotionally unavailable due to a fear of passivity. This was probably Pauline’s case. Such mothers impose their own desires without being able to take into account those of their baby. They are unable to look at their baby, re only able to look at themselves. As a result, the relation is no longer experienced as a pleasure that can be shared, but as an aggression, causing “rage” and turmoil. This threatens the core of the infant’s identity, creating antagonism between their need to be their personal self and their relationship with the other. Clearly, in this case, the most appropriate solution is to protect oneself from the relationship by trying to be self-sufficient. We learn to trust and mistrust from others, from our environment. This trust, given and received, does not only concern the relationship with the other. It gradually becomes increasingly secure in me, where my narcissistic bases develop.

To summarise, it is important to recognise that a lack of maternal reliability generates a terrible vicious circle. The fear of the other generates relational difficulties and prevents the development of self-esteem. Self-confidence is built – or not – on trust in the other and vice versa. The first relationship is fundamental, but all subsequent relationship can help to build trust or, on the contrary, destroy it.

This is precisely what this family suffered from: a double lack of reliability. Jean and his parents’ stories show to what degree such embracing and tender attention was lacking. All three grew up in families abounding in ideals but extremely anxiogenic due to a lack of sensory and emotional interaction. Jean also experienced two parallel extremes. There was an illustrious aspect: his prestigious father Georges, a war hero, who was Canadian ambassador to France. This role gave him access to relations with the world’s greatest figures such as the Queen of England and several popes. At the same time, there was the terrifying aspect of the war; many trips between Canada; Switzerland, England and France; the stock market crash and money problems; and anxiety generated by his mother Pauline’s bouts of depression. There was no security on which to build trust, except perhaps the security attributed to Providence.

What was the state of the relationship between Georges and Pauline and their relationship with Jean in this anxiogenic context? We have already mentioned the heroic “armour” Georges built around himself, and which Pauline reproaches him of much later. In any case, that Georges had no empathy for Pauline’s emotions seems evident. How can a young man offer the young girl he is courting trench maps and a box containing the mud from his boot the day he lost his leg? He had no idea of Pauline’s feelings or desires, nor any inclination to understand them. His main concern was to project the image of a hero, a man of honour and duty who sacrificed himself for his country.

Unlike her husband, Pauline was haunted by a negative image of herself. The resulting severe depression prevented her, like him, from taking any interest in others. Georges who often referred to depression during his adolescence, had evacuated all negative emotions by locking himself in the “all good”. However, in his book on Thérèse Vanier, Ann Shearer (op. cit., p. 12) noted that, because of his position as ambassador, he was called “H.E.” or “*His Excellency*” which could also have been translated as “*High Explosive*”. Extreme violence simmered behind the armour. The two extremes coexisted, unconscious of one another. This anecdote is particularly interesting: Georges offered to translate a peace conference for Mackenzie King, Canada’s Prime Minister who spoke very little French. Instead of translating what the speaker said, he expressed his own thoughts, “finding new and moving words about the Canadians’ sacrifice in Dieppe.”¹ One of many examples of his difficulty listening to and heeding what others had to say.

Pauline, on the other hand, had allowed herself to be invaded by the “all bad”. Neither Georges nor Pauline was able to express emotion. They were both confronted – in completely different ways – with the same loneliness and the same confusion between the personal self and the other. It was either fusion or loss. While religion offered them both the third space they lacked in relational experiences, their religions were not the same. Georges was raised as a Jansenist where law, duty and the fear of hell prevailed. On the contrary, in Pauline’s case, love and mercy were the priorities.

1. R. Speaight, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

Given the highly insecure environment and family context, it is difficult to imagine what Jean experienced. As mentioned previously, there are very few documents or testimonies available on the subject. First, a detour is required to describe his brothers' and sisters' journeys. Jean was the fourth child after his sister Thérèse, two brothers Benedict (known as Byngsie) and Bernard. He had a little brother Michel, 13 years younger than him. Thérèse never married, engaging actively in charitable works. According to the book written about her by A. Shearer (p. 18), she waited until she was 75 to mention "the poignant fight she waged against depression". Neither Jean nor Byngsie, who became a monk, ever married. The other two siblings married but later divorced, which was observed with bitterness by Pauline who created an institute dedicated to the family (Institut de la Famille).

It is important to note we have little information about Jean's childhood. His mother suffered from severe depression when he was born and could not take care of him. Nanny Tompson replaced his mother. How did she look after him? We have no information about her. It seems she gave Jean the relational continuity he didn't have with his parents and that Jean stayed in contact with her. He also went to war and moved incessantly. He was falsely accused of killing a calf in a castle where the family was clearly unwelcome.

Information about J. Vanier's time at college where his two brothers were also educated leads to reflection. His brothers had excellent reports, but Jean was described as turbulent, agitated and whimsical. Perhaps he felt insecure compared to his brothers, unable to compete with them at school. He was 13 when his brother Michel was born and took his place as the youngest sibling. This liberated Jean from a form of maternal control, and he decided to enlist in the navy. It is also around this time that his father tried to convince the Canadians to help France which had been invaded by Germany. Later he said:

"It was the first time I had a desire, a desire of my own, and that desire... drove me to leave the family, to go to a Protestant military college. [...] What drove me? I've been wondering for years. I think personal conscience is what ultimately carries us, drives us. I can say I was carried."¹

1. Interview with J. Vanier by A.-S. Constant, 17 September 2013.

Curiously, he rarely alluded to this in his daily diary entries in 1941 and 1942. For example, on Saturday, 16 May 1942: "*Daddy has news that I leave in the next troopship which sails on June 1st (absolutely secret).*" Otherwise, his diary entries began practically the same way every morning: about how he "slept well" then went to Mass and took communion, sometimes serving at Mass, then having breakfast, then listing various school activities such as physics and maths. He also mentioned many sports activities including handball, basketball, skating, softball and hockey. J. Vanier sometimes mentioned a dish or cake he liked, but there was never any mention of relationships with comrades, nor of what he might have been feeling. His entries were constant and repetitive descriptions of various daily occupations. This is one of the few comments about the birth of his brother Michel on 8 August 1941: "Went swimming. Lunch. Rest. Went to see Mummy. She's fine, and the baby was awake and kicking. Very charming. Dinner. Radio. Bed."

I was also entrusted with J. Vanier's correspondence with his parents between 1935 and 1939, found in his archives. The letters from 1938 are particularly significant. It would be a pleasure for any parent to receive such letters. Jean had learnt and respected all the codes of propriety. But typically, he never mentioned any relations with friends. He often mentioned his brother Byngsie, but simply to say that he "saw" him. His descriptions were always factual with prevailing affability. He never complained or expressed disagreement except once in a letter dated 20 February 1938 when he was 10. He wrote to both his parents (*Dear Mammy and Daddy*) to tell them how much he had enjoyed being with them the day before. He also made it clear that when they collected him for lunch in the future: "*I don't like anyone with me, except Bernard and you too.*" The letter ends with "*Lots of love from Jock*" in very big letters, then a PS: "You can pick us up for lunch on Shrove Tuesday after 11:30 a.m.." This leads us to conclude that he dares to say how much he yearns to finally have his parents to himself with his brother. Before expressing this request, he wrote that he wanted to overcome his shyness but that he didn't want anyone to know, and that in any case, he couldn't say it to anyone. He was already preoccupied by projecting a perfect image, like his father.

It seems he was appreciated during the many years he was in the navy, but his loneliness persisted. The discipline of the army undoubtedly provided him with a reassuring framework and boundaries.

Before going any further, let's try to understand what Jean felt when his body, pleasure and sexuality had been neglected by a lack of recognition and loving affection. How then do we understand his mental functions?

As we have already said, his relational experiences were chaotic and very distressing due to constant insecurity. He knew no relational continuity. He experienced nothing but relentless separations with an unpredictable mother and an absent father in a climate of fear due to the war.

Life generally begins by taking root in the body and senses. Constant emotional exchanges with the environment help to put feelings into words, intellectualising and gradually learning to build a personal territory, leaving the other to live in their own territory. In other words, creating a personal space away from the other. The opposite seems to be the case for Jean. Without friends and loving relationships, he found – even “invented” – his real life directly in his relationship with God, in the “spiritual” realm. References to divinity are constant, absolutising duty and self-abnegation. His diary entries refer to mass and communion every day. Prayer and rituals were his only sources of support. Furthermore, his letters to his parents abound with conventional rites. They feature constant repetition of learnt formulas, always “nice” and polite. It seems he found continuity in the repetition of learnt words, both in his relationships with his parents and with God.

His only escape from these shackles, from his “armour”, were daily sports sessions where he was able to release what was simmering inside. But we repeat: his inability to internalise and represent, his prevailing internal insecurity and depressive anxiety, prevented him from developing a separation from the other. As a result, he was trapped in his need to give others a shoring role, which in turn made him fearful of being dependent and losing his autonomy. The clinical term for this is “functional limitation”: due to distortions in early emotional relationships, subjects suffer from intense internal insecurity. This results in anxiety of abandonment if the other moves away and anxiety of control if the other approaches. As a result, the other is identified as potentially

dangerous and unreliable, but the anxiety felt about the real other demonstrates an inability to let the other in with a fear of abandonment if they distance themselves or intrusion if they move closer. These subjects did not have access to the category of absence. In other words, they cannot allow themselves to be internally inhabited by the image of another they consider benevolent. Autonomy and dependence are painfully jeopardised. This helps us to understand Jean's immense solitude, but also what people who knew him frequently referred to as his need to control, sometimes even described as “manipulation”. It is difficult to behave otherwise when trust is not given in the early years of life.

A decisive meeting: J. Vanier and T. Philippe

J. Vanier met the Dominican via his mother. T. Philippe had contacted her to help him bring Canadians to L'Eau Vive. Meeting T. Philippe changed J. Vanier's life.

SIGNIFICANT DETAILS ABOUT T. PHILIPPE'S HISTORY

T. Philippe's grandfather, Félix Dehau, asked his fiancée, Marie, for devoted service to religion and good works. They married on the day of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They moved to Bouvines in May 1869 and had twelve children. Their first born, Pierre, was described as “delicate and nervous”. Jean was born after eight sisters on 6 June 1888. Their mother almost died in childbirth. Pierre, later known as “Father Dehau”, was ordained a priest: “His warm and heartfelt words were called to do great good.”¹ Jean was not thriving and caused concern for his parents. They sent him to boarding school where there was a short reprieve, then it was observed he soon began “suffering again”².

Two important aspects prevailed: the dominance of religion and the two boys' fragility. The girls were not mentioned.

There is an astonishing comment about T. Philippe's future mother, Elisabeth Dehau: “A ninth suitor came forward for Elisabeth, but it's not what we need yet.” Who made this comment? The parents?

1. Marie Dehau-Lenglart, *Livre de famille*, Editions l'Épi d'Or, vol. 1 and 2, vol. 1, p. 229.

2. Idem, vol. 1, p. 283, p. 290.

Elisabeth? In any case, on 20 September 1901, Elisabeth married a notary, Henri Philippe. They also had twelve children, nine of whom joined the orders. Jean, born in 1905, was the third child and later became “Father T. Philippe”. Henri, the eighth child, born in 1912, became “Father Marie-Dominique Philippe”. When their father, Henri Philippe left to fight in the First World War, Elisabeth’s brother, “Father Dehau” assumed the paternal role in the family. See this comment about the family:

“Father Pierre-Thomas Dehau exerted undeniable influence over his nephews and nieces through his powerful, unusual personality, his love for the Blessed Virgin, his charismatic spiritual direction. His prayer and example contributed to the many religious vocations in this family. His many nephews and nieces spent long hours in the old man’s company, reading to him in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and German. They admitted not understanding much of what they read, but their dear uncle, who was almost blind, explained and commented with delight and great elevation of spirit!”¹

Marie-Dominique Philippe described him as follows: “Father Dehau was part of the family, but he was a very ‘separate’ being who lived with a very big secret: Mary’s love for him.”² And the only way to return God’s love was to welcome Mary, the only one who really knew how to love God.³

Jean suffered from difficult episodes during his childhood. Not much is known about his mother. It is, however, safe to assume that as one of twelve children and with so many children herself, she had little time to devote to them individually. Jean wanted to become a priest when he was six years old. Then the war began. Their mother, alone with her nine children, in debt and without heating, was obliged to lodge German officers. During this period, the children were very deprived, going barefoot or wearing worn shoes. Later, Jean studied with the Jesuits in Lille. There was no public transport during the post-war period, so he made the difficult 15-kilometre journey by bike between their home and school every morning and evening. It was a long journey for the boy who was

1. *Idem*, vol. 2, p. 327, note 150.

2. Marie-Christine Lafon, *Marie-Dominique Philippe...*, 2015, p. 104.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

just 13. Due to hereditary deafness, he had trouble following his lessons and suffered mockery from his classmates¹. Despite being “one of the best in his class, he failed the baccalaureate”. “He had bad handwriting and examiners don’t bother to decipher when that’s the case.”

It is not surprising that Jean Philippe, or T. Philippe by his religious name, suffered from the acute anguish of abandonment. This was exacerbated by episodes of humiliation which enabled him to participate in the agony of Christ. A. S. Constant wrote:

“He speaks from experience, writing that everyone experiences different forms of anxiety, but that some are called to live [...] the acute anguish of abandonment, of dereliction that enables them to participate in the agony of Christ: “My God, my God, why did you abandon me?”²

But it was this anxiety that enabled him to empathise with all these poor humiliated people with a disability, or as A.-S. Constant writes, to be “porous to their suffering”³. This reflects his lack of boundaries which he had not developed. He had no protection and allowed himself to be overwhelmed by whoever tried: “Until one has suffered, it is not really possible to understand those who suffer.”

As a result, J. Vanier repeatedly said that L’Arche was founded by two men who had suffered humiliation⁴, and, it could also be said, by two men who had many common experiences – starting with their first names. The way J. Vanier expresses this is surprising. He refers to the humiliation of T. Philippe’s condemnation and the consequences. Strictly speaking, they were not humiliated. The Church had the right to end the nightmare occurring at L’Eau Vive and in neighbouring monasteries. T. Philippe and J. Vanier experienced the judgement as a humiliation. That was their perception. This is not admissible from a legal point of view.

1. Kathryn Spink, *J. Vanier et l’Arche*, 1990, p.32

2. A.S. Constant, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

3. A.S. Constant, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

4. A.-S. Constant, *op. cit.*, p. 130, quotes J. Vanier.

MYSTICISM AS AN ESCAPE?

T. Philippe developed his mystical theory in *La vie cachée de Marie*. The confirmation of a presence of God “embodied” in the relationship between Jesus and Mary seems to have provided an unhoped-for remedy for the anxiety triggered by emptiness and abandonment. Earlier, I underlined the fundamental faith and religious practices in the Philippe family characterised by a particular reverence for the Virgin Mary. In 1938, T. Philippe said he received a revelation from the Virgin Mary in front of the fresco of *Mater Admirabilis* in Rome. He revealed some – the least shocking – aspects in this volume of *La vie cachée de Marie*. Several extracts are important:

“The mentality of the times always leads us to see the human and psychological point of view, and not the point of view of faith and supernatural charity.” (p. 19, 1988)

According to T. Philippe, supernatural life was real life, the only life he knew, which reassured him and was worth living. He believed he was responsible for making this known.

“Mary, beloved mother, the Bride, the immaculate, had a life completely different to ours; in her there was no “*me*”, this reflective consciousness that constantly refers to itself, this excessive activity that attempts to impose itself on an aggressive mode and seeks joy.” (p. 35) “Her mystical consciousness stabilised her in supernatural love. This is the great mystery of the immaculate heart of Mary.” (p. 34)

This is a fundamental point of his theory: “In her, there is no *me*.” Interestingly, he justified his emotional flaws as both an asset and evangelical precepts of self-abnegation and sacrifice rather than tensions between opposites, good v. bad and love v. aggression, self v. other. He absolutised “self-abnegation” in radical poverty, smallness, silence, a void. He believed he no longer existed, leaving room for God only! He also denounced “everything bad” as a representation of reflexive consciousness, wanting to use words to describe experiences of pleasure and displeasure, urging to choose pleasure for itself. And if there is no *me*, there is of course no search for pleasure as such, and therefore no guilt. The advantage of this point of view, is there is no “other” either. Without *me*, there is no you and therefore no relationship. This removes any rivalry or notion of commitment, which

also confirms no guilt. The supernatural love through which Mary lives is absolute innocence and purity experienced in the moment of worship. Note the term “moment of worship” – each moment is unique, joining eternity, making it possible to ignore time!

“Love is poverty, humility and docility, purity of heart and sacrifice. It is, beyond all thought and representation, the absolute union of love.” (p. 38) “God is found in silence: simplicity of the infant with its mother – loving passivity essential to the union of love.” (p. 44) “Only the infant, nourished by its mother, knows, thanks to this intimate, vital contact, that the union of love is immediate and total.” (p. 45) “The Holy Spirit manifests his will to them whenever he pleases.”

He drew on the infant’s first experiences with its mother to support his thesis which is influenced by ideas developed by two psychiatrists he knew, Dr. Préaut and Dr. Thompson. But were they in fact their ideas or did he distort them? He said this in a 1973 lecture about “the ages of life”:

“The suckling infant experiences a peace that reflects Love... It seems clear that the infant is not dominated by consciousness of instinct but by consciousness of trust and love. The fundamental characteristic of the infant consciousness of the heart is that it is born through the contact with the other. Infants become conscious through the union, in communion with their mother, and not in opposition or difference, like when the “*me*” is formed.”¹

He wrote that the quest is to rediscover what occurs at the origin of life, an innocent communion in trust, communion of the body and soul, and of the self with the other. However, it seems he did not experience this “communion with his mother” at the beginning of his life, nor did he find it. Instead, he invented it out of his experience of abandonment. As a result, he confuses communion – which must be developed in stages of which he was not aware – with fusion and confusion. See the chapter above addressing the mother-child relationship which insists on the delusion represented by this first communion between them, and the need for a durable process of differentiation that can only be undertaken in a trusting relationship developed gradually with relational continuity.

1. See “Rapport de X. Le Pichon sur la place du Père T. Philippe dans la fondation de L’Arche”, 10 May 2016.

Yet, in this case, no “other” was constructed because there was no relational continuity.

“In her, Love is virginal: in her, no pleasure-seeking self, no focus on the self.” (47) “In the Gospel, there is no beatitude of pleasure seeking, but that of tears.” (48)¹

Note the emphasis on “tears”, suffering, sacrifice and martyrdom – experiences that reflect his own experiences. “Mary becomes a true slave of love, Queen of the prophets. Her vow of virginity is inspired and finalised by a thirst for martyrdom.” Yet it is after participating in the Agony and the Passion that our *me* finally dies and that Jesus can then allow us to enter the intimacies of hidden life. (p. 151)

In Mary consciousness purifies everything it touches and is a source of unity. Mary exists only to love and be loved. (p. 51) Through this virginal love, Mary dwells inside the Holy Trinity where there is nothing except love. It is a “new Adam and a new Eve” whose only goal is unitive life: “Jesus does not give Mary his body in a sacramental way; from the Annunciation it is a real and physical love relationship that it is given to him. Everything is finalised by a unitive life.» (p. 182) “Her love was supernaturalised at the source, in her relationship like the relationship between an infant and its mother. Breastfeeding has a pure quality, spiritual and mysterious. The infant has a religious and contemplative attitude. Mary remained in this first love (mystery of breastfeeding in prayer). This virginal love permeates the whole body – love can reveal itself under the humblest vestiges that are attached to the sense of touch (the most substantial sense from the point of view of existence). Does Love not reveal itself in divine touch like breath, etc.? This is the mystery of the Eucharist (p.60). Discovered in meditation surrounded by a world of sin and sinners.” This extract shows how ‘supernaturalisation’ was used to protect against any concept of incest between the mother and child.

Firstly, the existential importance of touch: sensation gives access to the reality of the body and becomes a way of reviving the spiritual – without touch, he is disconnected from reality². Secondly, it is

1. T. Philippe, *La vie cachée de Marie*, op. cit., p. 47-48.

2. I watched a filmed interview with T. Philippe that confirmed his constant quest

interesting to note that at the end of this paragraph he alludes to “evil”, to sin, but to put it outside, elsewhere – there is the world of pure and innocent love, which is his and in which he lives. Outside it, there is “a world of sin and sinners” which is the world of others.

“With Joseph inspired by the Holy Spirit, Mary institutes a kind of royal bondage and spiritual childhood.” (p. 64) Joseph, with a pure heart, only seeks to please God in the silence of love. Mary’s body is reserved for the good pleasure of her God – and, to her, Joseph is the visible representative of God. (p. 71) At the summit, virginity of the heart and inner silence meet. The Holy Spirit unites his friends to help them strip themselves of self and immerse themselves in the silence of love. This silence favours the delicacies of a love that forgets itself, ready to discover the desires of the other. (p. 73) Love here on earth can only be realised in sacrifice.”

These are the “instructions” conveyed to T. Philippe’s disciples: the body of a woman is reserved for the pleasure of a man “who is the visible representative of God”. Man and woman giving themselves to each other is a sacrifice in the silence of love, united by the Holy Spirit. Again and again it is about listening to the Holy Spirit alone, allowing it to act in one...with the intention of forgetting oneself “to discover the other’s desires”, except that the other, let us not forget, has remained totally confused with the one and has no reality. The other, is himself! And he continues:

“Supernatural love is a burning thirst for giving oneself to God in the form of a service to someone – the action: devotion, abnegation, a sacrifice (no longer contaminated by concupiscence (77).”

On the other hand, this shows T. Philippe’s generosity shown in his constant availability to others and significantly, to the most underprivileged. With blind perspective, abnegation and physical ardour, rife with confusion:

“The Prophet has a certain consciousness of God’s intervention, and this demands blind faith.” (p. 114) “The body of Jesus is a blazing flame. Jesus is thus the smallest of children and the most ardent Spouse.” (p. 123) Since original sin, this sense of intimacy has been lost. The adorable Body of

for contact. He constantly sought the public’s approval, saying “you see”, “you see” (DVD, La Ferme).

Jesus is the unique instrument of grace. The contact, the intimate union with this body is essential for us all. It is the effective sign that can introduce us into the life of love of the adorable Trinity.” (p. 152)

The text concludes with “the wisdom of love”:

“Two wisdoms lead the world: prayer and sacrifice which hasten the coming of Jesus, invisible dimensions of man’s reason. Thus when love inhabits a soul, the external senses themselves, much more than reason, can be the immediate instruments of love. Mary is instructed by the word of love which demands presence, because she remains in her heart, in the silence of love. But man is free to accept or refuse this gift of grace: either he will have a passive attitude to infinite Love, or he will choose independence and proud reason. Jesus preached to inaugurate this new era of Love formed in the image of the Immaculate Queen for three years. And for this mission, Jesus trained several disciples in the image of what he himself wanted to achieve in Mary.”

This is how T. Philippe educated his disciples “in the image of what he himself wanted to achieve in Mary”. But before discussing his meeting with J. Vanier, we will try to see how this “mystical” theory, which gives his suffering purpose and soothes his anxiety, reflects how his mind functioned.

Two remarks: Firstly, a reminder of the necessary foundations for the construction of any life: through pleasure shared with the mother, an infant can both gradually develop and detach itself to find a personal place. In my opinion, this is exactly the issue here. T. Philippe “found” – or rather “invented” (because he never found shared pleasure with his mother nor anyone else) this pleasure shared between Mary and Jesus; a pleasure ideally shared but which was in no way affectionate and therefore a solitary pleasure. He called this absolute pleasure “communion”, “unitive life” which unites body and soul, earth and heaven. Jesus and Mary – the object of his prayers – became real people.¹ The original, even brilliant, aspect of this theory, from T. Philippe’s perspective alone, is that the body and the other finally find a place (a place combining the real for the body and the imaginary for the “other”) without any guilt. In fact, we remain in the inverted absolutes of the beginning of life.

1. Father Thomas’ spiritual life seemed so intense. He was so *comfortable* with Jesus and Mary that he talked about them like members of his family.

Displeasure – his personal experience of humiliation and abandonment – is categorised as “everything good and all good” and considered an imperative priority in the form of self-sacrifice, of complete abnegation, and self-sacrifice of giving oneself totally to the “other”, identifying with the agony and Passion of Christ.

Pleasure is categorised as “all bad” and totally ignored. Indeed, the aim is to make the pleasure-seeking, selfish self disappear, sustaining the self in prayer, silence and the unique will to give all to the other. This is how the pleasure he experienced with women was not felt as his own, but as innocent pleasure between Jesus and Mary.

Note that:

1. This world is not exactly binary as it constantly refers to the Holy Spirit – this third-party place. Except it raises the question as to who this Holy Spirit is, when the only reference made is to a small inner voice in ourselves to which we should surrender and never ask a third person’s opinion.
2. What does “passive attitude to infinite Love” mean? This so-called passivity or abandonment is only an insidious – and unconscious – way of imposing his will which is, of course, not his, but the will of Jesus!¹

He used this vast confusion to trap women he wanted close relationships with. This will be addressed again below.

WHAT J. VANIER SAID ABOUT MEETING T. PHILIPPE

Firstly, a reminder of what the two men had in common.

- They shared an emotional void and insecurity, probably more severe in T. Philippe, which means they experienced extreme loneliness.

Both the Philippe and Vanier families compensated for this void with the omnipresent world of the supernatural and Providence where religion was the only security. For them human experience was not reality. Reality was in prayer and in the relationship with an omnipresent God.

Despite an age difference of over twenty years, they identified with each other, seeing their own reflection in the other. This revelation of their identities helps to understand the existential importance of their

1. This was his motto for seduction: It’s not us, it’s Jesus and Mary!

meeting! J. Vanier did not deny this existential importance, which was his demise when T. Philippe was condemned. He was also obliged to condemn T. Philippe – his master and his own reflection. On the tenth anniversary of T. Philippe's death, he said:

“Very quickly, I discovered something unique with Father Thomas. I discovered through him, through his word, through his whole attitude, that I was loved by God. Meeting him – whenever I saw him – led me to great inner freedom, a joy, like an inner light, a peace and a feeling of being renewed or forgiven or cleansed. I think many of us had that kind of experience with Father Thomas.” (p. 306)

He describes it as “something unique”! This relation seems to have finally fulfilled all his deeply suppressed needs for affection. For the first time, he felt loved by someone, and he was no longer alone. What's more, that person didn't make him feel completely trapped, because it was the love through God which he had searched for from a very young age. He said he didn't only discover that T. Philippe loved him, but through him, he also discovered God's love for him – loved by God and “forgiven or cleansed”. He was cleansed of his guilt. This crucial point helps us to understand how he operated. He speaks of inner freedom, peace and joy. His thirst to be loved was finally fulfilled. Of course, T. Philippe had a strong hold over him, but this power did not seem total, given that it came from God. His faith in God was the third-party place where he found some freedom.

At the end of 1963, T. Philippe moved to Trosly as chaplain of a small institution for the mentally ill. J. Vanier visited him for Christmas. After, he said:

“It was attraction and fear. [...] Attraction to a mystery and repulsion for what is abnormal. But above all, I was seduced by their cry for friendship. They all circled around me like bees circling around flowers. They touched me, asking: “Will you come back to see us?” I could hear their mute cry. Like an enormous cry for a relationship. It was very gentle, incredibly gentle. There was some violence between them, but in their relationship with me, there was this call, this cry for me to become their friend.”¹

1. Interview with J. Vanier, 20 December 2013, quoted in A.-S. Constant, *J. Vanier*, p. 104

These people with disabilities crying out for a relationship were like him. They had the same thirst for a relationship. Once again, he let his emotions about the meeting overwhelm him. This feeling became his compass. His success as a speaker was undoubtedly due to this. He didn't try to intellectualise, trying rather to create an experience which became his constant quest: communion in a relationship with a person.

This meeting with people with disabilities was decisive for him. It confirmed the existential importance of touch, of contact for developing a relation. It also, as much as was still necessary, reinforced his acceptance of T. Philippe's conception of sexuality.

He wrote the following in *Homme et femme il les fit* (1984)¹:

“A boy abandoned by his mother and placed in foster care does not receive the physical affection he needs. His whole body calls for a mother's tenderness. Take Georges who lives in one of our communities. He has an almost uncontrollable need to touch and caress women, to attract them to him. His need to touch and be touched is not necessarily linked to genital sexuality. It is not, strictly speaking, an expression of sexual drive. It is his deficient body crying out, wanting to be loved and appreciated by a mother. The body remembers the deficiencies of physical affection.”

In *Jésus le don de l'amour* (1994), he expressed another form of the flesh/divine equivalence in the gift of oneself to the other, transfiguring sexuality:

“The Word did not become flesh as one puts on a garment which one then removes, it is the flesh which becomes divine. It becomes the means by which this life of love of God, in God, is communicated. This life is not an idea taught by books or teachers. It is the presence of one person to another, the gift, the total gift of one to another, Heart to heart, Communion in love.”

He connected this communion to the mystery of incarnation:

“I consider we are talking far too much about sexuality and not enough about communion, which is a fundamental human need. It is important to reflect on the relationship between communion and the body, between collaboration and communion, on what is a broken communion and the consequences. I would also like to dig deeper and address the mystery of

1. J. Vanier, *Homme et femme il les fit*, 1984, p.72

incarnation: the fact that God is three people in communion with each other and that Jesus came to share this communion with men.”¹

He adopted the notion of “love in friendship” expressed by M.-D. Philippe which was in no way friendship of utility or pleasure:

“Love in friendship is spiritual. It does not exclude passion. It ennobles and transcends passion. It is deep and personal. Chosen freely. And mutually. It respects the friend, wanting only the best for them. It provides a little rest and great joy because one feels loved by the loved one.”²

He goes on to speak of *interpersonal love*. The words ring true, making it difficult to not accept them spontaneously. Yet the notions behind the words are confused. Like T. Philippe, an abysmal lack of authentic experiences of shared pleasure and physical connection prevented any process of separation from another person, with whom it would then be possible to develop connection. Hence a lack of confidence in each other and in oneself that generated fear of any dependency.

Yet the solution is there, in this confusion: forget the body and its sensations and this lack of confidence in oneself and in the other! Forget everything “human”! Reality is in Providence after all. According to T. Philippe’s theory, it all begins in the supernatural life where everything is already realised and unified in Love. This is where the body and sensations can become the instruments of communion and silent adoration. Rather than transforming the contradictions: Good/Evil, Self/Other, continuity/discontinuity into paradoxes of life, they are abolished in an Absolute spiritual relationship that mixes the same with the other, sensation with affect, the body and the soul. All that remains is submission to the will of God. This is worth repeating because it is difficult to understand. Any human relationship Jean experienced - sexual or not - was only important for the relationship it allowed with God. This explains that most of the intimate relationships he had with women were considered in prayer and the silence of worship.

Three facts become clear when attempting to understand this reflection:

1. K. Spink, *J. Vanier et l’Arche*, 1990, p.182

2. M.-C. Lafon, Marie-Dominique Philippe. *Au coeur de l’Église du XX^e siècle*, DDB, 2015, p. 427.

“My experience tells me that sexual urges are more a cry for a relationship than for pleasure. [...]»

“If we could stop seeing the manifestation of genital sexuality as the exercise of a right to pleasure or as a problem to be solved, if we could recognise the need to create permanent connections to escape isolation, it would be a big step towards true education.”¹

“We each have the innocent heart of a child where the grace of God resides [...] because great suffering, the great sin of human beings, is no longer believing in the innocence of communion and mutual trust that give way to what is universal. [...] It takes two to be fertile. [...] In the Christian vision of sexuality, the man and the woman make the mystery of the Trinity present. Our God is not a solitary God. God is three people.”²

He also developed a very interesting theory about pleasure as an “intermediary”: “When pleasure is considered as an end in itself, as an absolute, it turns us in on ourselves. When it is considered a healing gift, it opens us to others. Pleasure is no longer a filter that prevents us from seeing others. It is an intermediary [...] for reaching out to others, making friends, loving them and cooperating. This is the most beautiful form of pleasure.”³

1. Time takes on a special meaning: eternity does not pass, and continuity is found in God rather than in the relationship with any one person. They are commitments without human commitments thanks to the present moment of unitive life.
2. The reality of celibacy: the desire to give oneself to all in God – which protects the self from any relationship since the desire is to give oneself entirely to everyone and to no one in particular. All that counts is sharing, concern for the connection and giving oneself.

However, in a sense, this solution allowed him to unify body and soul in his own way. He found a form of pleasure consistent with his faith in T. Philippe’s theories. His version was wanting to give everything (give everything *and not share*) in the relationship with the o/Other. This provided him with impetus and a purpose, unfortunately overshadowed by his difficulty to receive and his existential fear of depending on someone!

1. J. Vanier, *Homme et femme il les fit*, p. 111

2. *Ibid*, p. 46 and 160

3. J. Vanier, *Homme et femme Dieu les fit*, 2009, 2nd edition, p. 223.

Choosing to care for people with a disability was a fortunate experience. It made it possible to confirm, in a thirst for communion, the importance of the body and touch (which he so cruelly lacked). It also made it possible for him to receive, as it did not threaten his sovereignty.

What he sorely missed, and which caused him to lose control, was the presence of a third party. He wanted a guide he could confide in. Yet he also fought to avoid this through fear of any form of captivity, fear that someone would get their hooks into him. He only accepted any degree of captivity in his relationship with T. Philippe!¹ The second trap was the small group of “followers” which gave the illusion of a mystical sharing that must be kept secret. The last trap: the aura that grew around him, accentuating his loneliness.

Brigitte, Hélène and Judy

After analysing J. Vanier’s mental functions, it is necessary to address the type of relationship he was able to maintain with certain women. We have shown how emotions were evacuated from his family and the constant recourse to idealisation and spiritualisation. We have also discussed how Jean was unable to verbally express his emotions. Such as in his diaries where he was only able to relate facts and never mentioned any relationships. His solitude is another example. The meeting with T. Philippe opened J. Vanier to a relationship – an unusual but loving relationship with one condition: “the *me* must disappear.” J. Vanier no longer existed. He had tipped over to the divine. Jesus loved through him. He was like the representative of God on earth with the difference that the loving dimension was indeed present, distinguishing it from regular pathologies.

This condition provides total protection from his existential fear of dependency. He could love infinitely if he was not personally involved. No one could expect anything from him because he didn’t exist! It will become clear that when he felt emotional fear, he was unable to show empathy. On the other hand, when the exchange was based on

1. Why did he constantly avoid his mother when she moved to Trosly? She complained herself that she rarely saw her son. Perhaps he feared the hold she would have over him.

spirituality, he was able to experience and share a true and loving relationship. We heard the testimonials¹ of three women about their “relationship” with J. Vanier. They each had very different emotions. For example, Judy had negative, bitter feelings. Hélène on the other hand, was able to clear the ambiguity from the relationship at one stage, and have a real friendship with J. Vanier. Brigitte was grateful to J. Vanier for the alliance she experienced with him and his trust in her. How was the same man able to trigger such contrasting reactions? These are their testimonials, starting with Judy who, as an English speaker, went so far as to say she felt like a “*spiritual whore*”.

JUDY’S WOUND

Judy was a 22-year-old Anglican who went home after a year at Trosly-Breuil and converted to Catholicism. This conversion was triggered by a retreat run by J. Vanier who was her godfather. At the time, she testified that it was “a very strong spiritual awakening which gave her great peace” and a positive experience with strong camaraderie. Her conversion brought her closer to an aunt who was also Catholic. She tells this made her mother – whom she described as “very harsh” – jealous, without giving any more details. Apparently, she felt she had found her missing anchor. She often prayed with J. Vanier who became her spiritual companion. They held hands or held their faces closely, but there was no ambiguous contact.

The relationship became more physical during her second internship at L’Arche. One day, he offered her a sari: “My mother made a sari for you.” This made her feel “special”, chosen. This is when her relationship with Jean took a strange turn, plunging her into deep confusion. She tells that after the first night she couldn’t sleep and thought:

“Well, what does that mean? *Is he going to marry me?* I was so naive. I came from a very small town where no one had sex before marriage! He was single, me too. I didn’t understand.”

1. Two of the witnesses requested that their testimonies remain anonymous. We were purposefully vague about details such as names and places and any other details that may indicate their identity.

This incomprehension was amplified by the complete discrepancy between how she perceived herself as a young “very small town” girl who had never had a romantic relationship and adulated and admired J. Vanier.

“He was a very important character to me that I trusted for a very long time, very charismatic – he achieved so much by creating many communities; it was providential; part of me was convinced that he had a direct connection to God.”

This idealisation – even divinisation – was shared by all those around her. J. Vanier added spirituality to justify his behaviour to these stark differences between them:

“It’s not us, it’s Jesus and Mary. You are chosen – it’s special, secret. That’s how he tried to convince me. It all seemed very sexual to me, not spiritual. I was young, naive. I was confused. I couldn’t understand it was not us, that it was Jesus and Mary who behaved sexually, but I didn’t question him. I thought the problem came from me, from my spiritual indigence which was why I couldn’t understand the importance of what was going on between us.”

Judy insisted on this in another interview:

“I wasn’t spiritual enough to understand the gift being given to me. And I lived with it, I wasn’t holy enough [...] to understand the meaning of his words: “It’s a special gift – You are chosen”; and he added: “A lot of people in the world wouldn’t understand, you can’t talk about it but you are chosen.” I felt like I was living a lie, doing something wrong.”

Her suffering only widened the gap between them, accentuating her feeling of mediocrity, her insignificance. He was everything and she was nothing, even worse, she was dirty, guilty, “a spiritual whore”. She was driven by a need to talk about it, but Jean told her not to. Even worse, if she had, who in the community would have believed her? She decided to discuss the confused feelings her relationship with J. Vanier triggered with T. Philippe. Strangely, he told her to visit him at 10:00pm and made her do similar things. The behaviour was practically the same. What’s more, he used exactly the same words about Jesus and Mary. In fact, it was worse, because she felt there was a form of love with Jean, whereas in his case, there was “a sort of emergency, an eruption”. She even called him an “animal”. The spider’s web had closed over her.

Judy married a few years later, but she testifies to the trauma of all these experiences: “For a long time it perturbed all sexuality for me, with this obligation of non-penetration to avoid getting pregnant.” She underwent therapy as a result.

Several years after leaving L’Arche, Judy saw J. Vanier again. She told him how much their sexual/spiritual relationship had affected her. She asked him to stop such relationships with women who were vulnerable like her younger self as it may hurt them permanently. J. Vanier responded: “I’m sorry, that was your experience.” She interpreted this as: “I’m sorry you didn’t understand.” How could he have so little empathy? She also told him what had happened with T. Philippe when she went to see him for advice about her relationship with him. J. Vanier seemed surprised, even shocked. He immediately changed the subject and began speaking – unusually for him – about the difficult relationship he had with his mother as a little boy, saying that it continued to be difficult for him! In her testimony, Judy speaks of three-fold abuse: spiritual, psychological and, of course, sexual. The spiritual abuse was the worst. She said: “I feel like he stole my emerging spirituality.”

We will try to understand her judgement from her perspective. Judy was young and inexperienced with no fully developed emotional roots. She was looking for a purpose in life, and more particularly a reassuring place where she could find herself. That is where she met J. Vanier, the “holy man” who motivated her with his explanations about love. She was incapable of defending herself when, as her spiritual guide, he “chose” her (how incredibly fortunate she was!), using affectionate-erotic gestures which he justified with spiritual arguments based on Jesus and Mary. She was trapped at every level. He was recognised as a saint, which the tenderness of his magnificent work with people with a disability justified. He had also done a thesis in philosophy which led Judy to think he was learned with regard to Jesus and Mary. She was totally under his spell. She repeated over and over that she was completely confused. She did not want Jesus to choose her – an unknown girl, but J. Vanier, this well-known man... Finally, wasn’t the Jesus she was seeking being used to force her? What’s more, in those intimate moments, there was no room for verbal or emotional exchanges. They were each in their own world, two worlds totally alien to each other. These encounters between them – which I

believe were not many – did not continue. Thus Judy’s cruel deception, her suffering at not being understood or recognised, was on a par with the idealisation she felt at the beginning of their relationship. She felt – and justifiably so – deceived and abused.

J. Vanier, on the other hand, saw the situation from a completely different point of view. The result was a *quid pro quo*. He was sincerely seeking spiritual communion with another person (regardless who) that included the body, a place of prayer and silence, of complete sharing, where he believed they could together share life with the Trinity ... and this protected him from a true emotional relationship. Yet it was precisely this type of relationship that Judy wanted, and this put J. Vanier in danger of a dependency he so feared.

HÉLÈNE’S TESTIMONY

Interestingly, Hélène’s experience of the same type of relationship with Jean was completely different. This is her full testimony:

“When I had the opportunity to visit L’Arche in Trosly-Breuil, I was impressed by the joy and diversity of the people in the community and the room given to spiritual life. I went back with the intention of staying for one or two semesters. J. Vanier, director of the community at the time, did not hesitate to invite assistants to meet with him. During those meetings, I gave my opinion and ideas about the home I was in. I found these exchanges with J. Vanier interesting. He was open and welcoming, a bit like a father, contrasting with mine who was somewhat distant. These meetings ended with a brief prayer when he took my hands in his. Once, at the end he surprised me by taking me in his arms during the prayer. The next time, he brought his face very close to mine, like an invitation to kiss. It was me who kissed him on the lips first. I was very surprised by the direction the relationship with J. Vanier was taking. Had I seduced him? Or had he seduced me? What did it all mean? I asked him about it and he answered with St. Augustine’s quote: “Love and do what you want”! He asked me to respect the priest at confession and avoid saying anything that might shock him. I did, however, speak to Father Thomas, who I trusted spiritually at the time! despite finding him physically repugnant, which was not at all the case for J. Vanier. Father Thomas responded rather evasively, saying that perhaps J. Vanier needed it!

During the first two semesters, I was so fulfilled by the relationships with the people in the home and life with the team of assistants, the community and spiritual life of L’Arche, that I wanted to pursue the experience in

another community. The relationship with J. Vanier was secondary to my personal quest. He encouraged me to take this path.

We met again at spiritual retreats or sessions organised by L’Arche. The relationship resumed as before, and we were delighted to be back together. One of these meetings took place in the room where he was staying. There was a bed which was more comfortable for simply hugging, caressing and kissing.

Another time, he undressed himself, it was like a silent invitation to go further; which I didn’t want, which he completely accepted. He didn’t like talking about what we were doing together. I asked him if he was doing the same with other women, which he answered with silence. I told him that I couldn’t live with it if I was married, or simply with another person at the same time. And I was beginning to have doubts. He often cited the relationship between Francis of Assisi and Claire, as though it confirmed that this kind of relationship was good. But I had never thought of their relationship that way, so I wasn’t at all convinced. He also said, “I hope other people do what we do.” I tried to talk about the relationship with an abbot at a monastery who knew Jean. He was unable to hear me out and hastened to say I was making it up. And another person who knew him and whom I trusted, had the same reaction.

I no longer felt comfortable in the secrecy of this type of relationship. I said it made no sense to me and that this sort of relationship was going nowhere. He answered: “Yes, but it is good for us.” He didn’t seem to understand how this form of relationship could be a problem for me, and despite my questioning, he didn’t seem to want to try to understand. I told him I didn’t wish to completely stop the relationship, but that I wanted us to remain friends, which he immediately accepted without any spiritual blackmail or pressure. We had less contact after that. We saw each other from time to time and our relation was simply friendly and unambiguous. That would have been fine for me if that had been the case from the beginning. We continued to discuss many subjects that interested us both.

He also later spoke of his despair when he had to denounce Father T. Philippe in a public letter.

I also spoke with Jean about Father Gilbert Adam who was a chaplain for a long time at Trosly-Breuil and whose homilies I had found intolerable at the Masses I had attended. J. Vanier was surprisingly indulgent of him, even after a complaint was made against him. It was later filed without further action. He seemed to say that it was more important that Father Gilbert Adam had lived in L’Arche among the poor. Perhaps J. Vanier considered L’Arche to be “the Kingdom” and some “laws” did not apply there?

I heard that when his Trosly-Breuil community celebrated his 90th birthday, J. Vanier spoke at the end, talking about his life and the fact that he had not really had a family life as a child, about his mother's illness at his birth, that they had also moved a lot, about his parents' important roles in society, and that he had finally found a family. Apparently, he nearly broke down crying when he spoke of this, like a vulnerable little boy!"

BRIGITTE AND THE DISCOVERY OF "INCARNATE FAITH"

The discovery of "incarnate faith" was a path to freedom. When Brigitte met J. Vanier, she had been married for several years and had children. Her husband, who had a complicated past, was difficult to live with. J. Vanier offered her spiritual guidance because she was looking for support from someone who could speak to her about God: "I want to grow in my relationship with Jesus." Very quickly, "non-verbal language" through the body began, leading her to question him: "I wasn't sure if this was spiritual guidance or deep affection that led to such unity between us." Initially, the relationship was emotional rather than sexual. Jean answered with questions by referring to a somewhat similar relationship he had with Father Thomas and added: "Don't worry. It is the Lord leading us, leading you. Trust in him." Which she did: "I was convinced that this mystical relationship was given, a gift of unity willed by the Lord [...] a gift that gives more life than it takes away." She added:

"My relationship with Jean opened a greater freedom in myself and in my profound identity which I didn't see as negative and which helped me to become an adult in my faith. [...] I never felt the relationship was manipulative. On the contrary, I had the impression it gave me the strength to connect my faith with my everyday life, to assume my family responsibilities, and I never questioned the fruits of this affection, this benevolence."

There was no confusion. Brigitte's desire to grow in faith coincided with the trust that grew between them. Of course, she wondered about this "double life" but on one hand, her couple was very difficult and, on the other hand:

"Jean always reassured me about my vocation in the couple [...] and when I could share with Jean, telling him difficulties I was experiencing, it gave me strength to take on the day-to-day of marriage. I perceived it as a

spiritual force – the sexual dimension was absolutely not the priority. I felt like my faith had matured – it was an incarnate faith."

This relationship lasted for many years. Brigitte entrusted the Commission with many letters Jean wrote to her. Several passages help to explain what she experienced with Jean and vice versa.

Letter dated 17 December:

"My little sister, this morning Jesus urges me to write to you to tell you my communion in his heart, to tell you my prayer. Let him bring you into the mystery of Christmas even more completely. It is a celebration of the mother and her infant. The little one who is thirsty, who drinks; who drinks love, communion, who gives himself to his mother. He says with so much love, "Mummy". Mary says, "My little one". Mystery of tenderness in a world of war, oppression, poverty. I pray for each of you (and went on to list the names of her husband and children)."

Letter dated 18 July 1990:

"Dear Brigitte, when I pray for you, I am filled with this inner certainty that you are so loved by Jesus, that you are his beloved. May he call you to an intimate life with him – to live constantly in Him, with Him, so that you can be a seed of life and love for your family. He wants you to receive the gift of God so that you can give this gift of God [...] Jesus will teach you to love (names of husband and children) to love each one in all their commitments. He wants us to be bold, to have courage in this life of love, to help everyone to live in the truth, to help everyone to discover the true love that is both communion and the need for truth, for growth. Thank you for your letters [...] Jesus uses your letters to give me his grace. Sometimes when I pray to Jesus, He unites me with you."

The search for communion is the central theme of this relationship: "Pray that Mary will keep me on her heart, that she will nourish me, I have such a thirst, a thirst for this divine communion." "Yes, Oh beloved, I drink this presence, I drink this love you give me. I am very touched by this radical confidence that is given to us. You in me, I in you, so totally. Joy of giving myself totally to you, joy of receiving the gift of your being." "Oh Brigitte, this morning in the Holy Spirit I am so united with you. You in me, I in you for the glory of the Father." "Thirst to enter with you into the heart of the Trinity." "Always united in Jesus in joy. I love you."

However, this need for communion hid Jean's acute anxiety that he was able to reveal:

"Since I don't sleep much, I try to pray to read. But last night I felt anxiety. The night was a little long. I took refuge in Mary's heart, like a small child against her breast. And there you were, hidden in Mary, supporting me, loving me. I don't want to be among the grown-ups, I feel too small - I just want to live on love. Outside love, I am lost, I no longer live, like a fish out of water. Pray for me my little sister, that Jesus and Mary will support me, that Mary will support me during these long nights when I feel lost."

"Oh Darling, last night I took something to help me sleep, but it gave me a headache all day. Tonight I won't take anything, so I probably won't sleep. I beg Jesus to send you to me to turn my night of anxiety into a night of love, of marriage. Oh Brigitte forgive my audacity, but it is as if I can no longer contain this thirst for love. It explodes towards you and into you. I love you, my love, I love you, Oh dear Brigitte, your little Jean."

J. Vanier's relationship with Brigitte enabled him to confide his anxieties, his fears, his thirst for love to someone who understood and empathised with him. Perhaps it was the first time. It was certainly not common.

"Once in a while, I was, I think, an ear that could listen to what he was going through and I often felt there was nowhere else he could share what he was going through, and ultimately, he was very much alone. [...] He was constantly assailed by people who wanted to put him on a pedestal, glorify him, people who hung from him, wanting to touch the passing saint. This weighed heavily on him. And he protected himself. I wasn't in that relationship with him at all. I never put Jean on a pedestal. I refused to believe or say he was my idol. I was aware his vocation was not mine and that we were not destined for the same experiences."

Basically, beyond the moral question of adultery, it could be said that Jean and Brigitte shared a beautiful relationship and that, thanks to her, Jean was able to glimpse what it meant to accept to *receive*. At the same time, the legitimacy of this kind of three-way relationship must be questioned.

How to conclude?

The interesting aspect of this journey is that J. Vanier presents us with extremes, which is rare.

Extreme good (?): in his desire to give himself totally to the other, echoing his total investment in his faith in a God-Love that inspired him to "reveal his own beauty to the other" and that he tried to realise.

Extreme bad (?): unable to build a secure inner foundation, it was almost impossible for him to feel empathy when another person manifested their difference. This distorted his desire for communion. Apparently, he had little empathy and felt no guilt in that case. How could such a strong advocate of mercy answer Judy who asked him about his conduct towards her with: "I'm sorry, that was your experience" ? "There is what you experience – next to what I experience – they are not the same." He wondered how Judy was unable to understand him. His only solution was to barricade and pity himself, as a child, "in his difficult relationship with his mother", making Judy bear the burden of all the guilt!

As we have said again and again: his body, his sensations, his affect had been left fallow. T. Philippe's theory provided an escape with no guilt. T. Philippe could not play the role of a third party for J. Vanier. On the contrary, he reflected his own image, like a mirror, closing in on him again.

This has also already been pointed out: faith in a God-Love gave J. Vanier "another place to put his experiences", perhaps helping him to partially escape T. Philippe's hold. Unable to develop a real otherness, the openness given to him, this impulse for sharing and very strong commitment to action, were transformed under certain circumstances into an emotional hold and abuse of power, of which he was unaware. Even more toxic, this abuse of power was justified by religious arguments used to convince followers.

Did J. Vanier suffer from narcissistic perversion¹? In my opinion, that oversimplifies the case. As we have attempted to show, it is more complex. Thomas Philippe's case seriously raises the question of perversion. On the other hand, Jean Vanier suggests structural fragility that obliged him on certain occasions to barricade himself and defend his

1. For more on this topic: Nicole Jeammet, *Narcissisme et perversion*, Dunod, 2003, 2004, written with René Roussillon and Françoise Neau.

territory, particularly when he felt threatened by a hold over him. In Jean Vanier's case, there was no perverse organisation with the resulting pleasure of destroying, humiliating or reducing others to manipulated objects. He was, however, trapped by the absolutization of a Love that excluded, for him, any idea of Evil. He was a prisoner of his adoption of Thomas Philippe's delusional ideas and system of abuse.

Here is a list of the books I read and on which, together with the testimonies, I built my work:

Mary-Frances Coady, *Georges and Pauline Vanier. Portrait of a couple*, 2011

Mary-Frances Coady, *Mercy within Mercy. Georges and Pauline Vanier and the Search for God*, 2015

Deborah et George Cowley, *Portrait de Pauline Vanier*, 1994

Deborah Cowley, *Georges Vanier Soldier – The Wartime Letters and Diaries 1915-1919*, 2000.

Robert Speaight, *Georges P. Vanier soldat, diplomate, gouverneur général*, 1972

Kathryn Spink, *J. Vanier et l'Arche*, 1990, p. 32

Anne-Sophie Constant, *J. Vanier, portrait d'un homme libre*, 2014

Ann Shearer, *Thérèse Vanier, pioneer of l'Arche*, 2016

Marie-Christine Lafon, *Marie Dominique Philippe Au cœur de l'Église du XX^e siècle*, 2015

T. Philippe *La vie cachée de Marie*, 1959, Second edition, 1988

Famille Philippe, *Livre de famille*, Volumes 1 and 2

J. Vanier, *Ton silence m'appelle*, 1971

J. Vanier, "*Homme et femme il les fit*" : *pour une vie d'amour authentique*, 1984

J. Vanier, *Homme et femme Dieu les fit*, 2009, 2nd edition

J. Vanier, *Le goût du bonheur*, 2000

J. Vanier, with François-Xavier Maigre, *Un cri se fait entendre. Mon chemin vers la paix*, 2017

We also had access to J. Vanier's 1941 and 1942 diaries (Fonds Vanier, BAC, Ottawa), correspondence exchanged with his parents from 1936 to

1939 (preserved in APJV), an unpublished text by J. Vanier (1990) about love and sexuality (Archives J. Vanier, London, Ontario), and many testimonies from women and men who lived with J. Vanier.

PART 7.

**Contribution to a
critical analysis
of Jean Vanier's spirituality**

Translation: *Christelle Giusti*

Introduction

Gwennola Rimbaut

The goal of our theological “investigation” is to attempt to characterize Jean Vanier’s spirituality, in order to look for elements that supported the growth of L’Arche but also fostered abusive behaviour towards certain women. This is indeed a critical analysis, based on selected books, to highlight problematic elements veiled by their author’s notoriety. Such an approach may appear surprising, given how extensive the work is and how many readers enjoyed it and found support for their own spiritual life and commitment towards people with disabilities. This fact calls for caution, so as not to hurt readers who haven’t had the opportunity to call J. Vanier’s words into question. Yet, the revelation of the abuse committed necessitates this critical work, which is easier to undertake now than before! We presume there is a link between the type of spirituality J. Vanier developed over decades, through his conferences, retreats, articles and books, and his actual observable behaviour, positive as well as negative.

Our discipline of practical theology does not require us to focus primarily on exegesis or ethical analysis, two theological disciplines which could have been used. “Practical theology corresponds to the most traditional definitions of theology, that of Anselm of Canterbury: *Fides Quarens Intellectum*, faith seeking understanding”¹. Its specificity is to

1. Marcel VIEAU, « De la théologie pastorale à la théologie pratique » (From Pastoral Theology to Practical Theology), Gilles ROUTHIER and Marcel VIAU (dir.), *Précis de théologie pratique* (Handbook of Practical Theology), Novalis / Lumen vitae, 2004, p. 43.

reflect upon the basis of practices which can be very diverse, ecclesial or social. It can also be based on the production of speeches, interviews and writings from diverse genres. In fact, every human practice is of interest to this discipline. In France¹, its academic development took place after the Second Vatican Council and was particularly connected with human sciences². The approach is essentially inductive, using methods suited to each research topic. It aims at developing a theological discourse anchored in reality and relevant in today's world.

Regarding J. Vanier, our task is to patiently explore some of the books through which he elaborated his way of thinking. Since he developed this approach as a disciple of Jesus Christ³, it can be analysed as a form of "practice" using the following theological criteria: vocabulary originating from Catholic traditions (namely the words "covenant" and "communion"), its relationship with the Scriptures as well as the (Carmelite) spiritual tradition, and the role of the Church.

We do not intend to explain in detail the intellectual filiation from J. Vanier to Fr T Philippe, his spiritual father, but we will highlight points where the connection is obvious. We started this analysis with vigilance, triggered by the revelation of abuse that L'Arche announced through the media⁴, as well as numerous elements shared⁵ with the

1. In Germany, the academic practical theology of protestant origin, dates back to Schleiermacher: *Le statut de la théologie: Bref exposé* (The status of theology: A Brief Report), Labor and Fides/ Cerf, 1994 (1st ed. 1810).

2. About the history of this discipline, cf. R. MARLÉ, *Le Projet de théologie pratique*, (The Project of Practical Theology), Beauchesne, 1979. Jean-Yves BAZIOU and Marie-Hélène LAVIANNE (dir.), *Entre mémoire et actions: l'émergence des théologies pratiques* (Between Memory and Actions: the Emergence of Practical Theologies, Novalis / Lumen vitae, 2004.

3. Jean Vanier always specifies in his introductions that he speaks from his experience at L'Arche and from "the Good News of Jesus", cf. for example: *Homme et Femme il les fit* (Man and Woman, He Made Them) Fleurus/Bellarmin, 1984, p. 18.

4. For example, Cecile HOYEAU's article, "Le mystère des frères Philippe : Comment ces deux dominicains condamnés par Rome en 1956 dans une affaire trouble mêlant mystique et abus sexuels ont-ils pu faire école en toute impunité ?" (The Mystery of the Philippe brothers: How have these two Dominicans condemned by Rome in 1956 in a murky affair involving mysticism and sexual abuses managed to gain a following with complete impunity?) *La Croix*, February 22nd, 2021, p. 13-20.

5. The monthly meetings and video conferences, as well as files shared on the internet, have supported this research work.

members of our Study Commission. Our theological analysis remains, therefore, centred on the search for the elements which characterize the spirituality of J. Vanier in these writings by questioning the points that we consider to be problematic. This work of deconstruction may be painful to committed readers who have been helped and supported by these books and by the ideals they truly contain, which we do not question. There may be chaff among good wheat, but as we shall conclude, chaff does not spoil the good wheat! At the time of harvest, what matters is to separate them and keep the best of J. Vanier's writings.

This research went through various stages. A first glance at some books allowed us to observe a massive use of the word "communion" when the assistants of L'Arche were invited to enter into a covenant with core members (people welcomed in the community). Hence the emergence of the following working hypothesis. If L'Arche is built on a spirituality of covenant with people with disabilities, J. Vanier mostly promotes a spirituality of communion taking roots in a form of Carmelite mysticism and anthropology, both inherited from his spiritual father, T.Philippe. A dangerous lack of individuality emerges.

Such a working hypothesis does not therefore ignore the proximity between J. Vanier's spirituality and that of T Philippe. We are simply seeking to demonstrate the existence of explicit or implicit bonds, and most importantly, to highlight the ambiguities of J. Vanier's spirituality of communion.

Given the considerable number of resources, we decided to focus on published books that were read by a large number of people. The selection of the analysed books has been essentially based upon publication dates in order to cover J. Vanier's entire period of work, not to mention the most famous books. To avoid having too many footnotes, we decided to reference books in-text: (acronym of the book, page number) or (acronym of the book, date of publication). The following table summarizes the acronyms. The quoted title will be written in full from time to time, to make the acronym more easily identifiable.

Acronym ¹	Complete reference
IWS	<i>Ma faiblesse, c'est ma force: un aperçu de la vie intérieure du général Georges Vanier de 1960 à 1967 (In weakness, strength: the spiritual sources of Georges Vanier 19th Governor General of Canada)</i> , Publishers: Bellarmin, 1980 [1972] (IWS) ;
YSCM	<i>Ton silence m'appelle (Your Silence Is Calling me)</i> , Publishers: Fleurus, 1971 (YSCM) ;
BNA	<i>Ne crains pas (Be Not Afraid)</i> , Publishers: Bellarmin/Fleurus, 1978 (BNA) ;
CG1	<i>La Communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête (Community and Growth)</i> , Publishers: Fleurus/Bellarmin, 1979 (CG1)
MW	<i>Homme et femme, il les fit : pour une vie d'amour authentique (Man and Woman, He Made Them)</i> , Publishers: Fleurus/Bellarmin, 1984 (MW) ;
TBB	<i>Le Corps brisé : retour vers la communion (The Broken Body: Journey to Wholeness)</i> , Publishers: Fayard/Bellarmin, 1989 (TBB) ;
JGL	<i>Jésus : le don de l'amour (Jesus, the Gift of Love)</i> , Publishers: Fleurus-Bellarmin, 1994 (JGL) ;
EPSS	<i>Toute personne est une histoire sacrée (Every Person Is a Sacred Story)</i> , Publishers: Plon, 1994 (EPSS) ;
BH	<i>Accueillir notre humanité (Becoming Human)</i> , Publishers: Presses de la Renaissance, 1999 (BH) ;
CG2	Extended edition of <i>La Communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête (Community and Growth)</i> , Publishers: Mame/Fleurus/Bellarmin, 1999 (CG2) ;
TST	<i>La Source des larmes : une retraite d'alliance (The Source of Tears: a Covenant Retreat)</i> , Publishers: Paroles et Silence, 2001 et 2014 (TST) ;
DMJ	<i>Entrer dans le mystère de Jésus : une lecture de l'Évangile de Jean (Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John)</i> , Publishers: Novalis/Bayard, 2005 (DMJ) ;
WNOA	<i>J'ai besoin de toi : Éloge de la fragilité ; (We Need One Another: Responding to God's Call to Live Together)</i> Publishers: Scriptura, 2019 [but the text is that of a retreat given in Africa in 2008] (WNOA) ;

1. Translator's note: The following analysis is based on French books. French titles and acronyms have been translated into English to make references more easily understandable. Therefore, the English acronyms only refer to the French books. The italicised English titles correspond to existing English versions of the French books and are provided for information only.

OLT	<i>Notre vie ensemble : une biographie sous forme de correspondance (Our Life Together: A Memoir in Letters)</i> , Publishers: Médiaspaul/Bellarmin, 2009 (OLT) ;
TST	<i>Les Signes des Temps : À la lumière de Vatican II (The Signs of the Times: Understanding the Church since Vatican II)</i> , Publishers: Albin-Michel, 2012 (TST).

Four stages took place between May 2021 and September 2022:

- A preliminary study of four books (IWS; BNA; TBB; JGL) to discover the salient axis of J. Vanier's spirituality and develop the working hypothesis;
- Location and analysis of the use of some terms widely used by J. Vanier : love, compassion, communion, unity, union, fusion... from a precise book: *Ton silence m'appelle (Your Silence Is Calling Me)*, (YSCM, 1971). This stage of research allowed us to consolidate the hypothesis;
- The third stage of research consisted in looking for a possible evolution of J. Vanier's spirituality by considering the anthropological turning point of his writings in 1994 (EPSS), and then by analysing two books written after this date (BH, 1999 and TST, 2012);
- The last stage of research allowed us to take another look at the results, and organize them around cross-disciplinary themes with some additional research. Regular meetings with the members of the Study Commission allowed us to create a connection with each researcher's work while ensuring independence of perspective. The fact that we had worked on a distinct body of resources made it easier for us to have this cognitive distance. As a result, the places where different points of analysis converge are more identifiable and impactful.

This final version has been organised into five chapters and a conclusion:

J. Vanier, a new spiritual master? After having introduced some distinctive elements of Jean Vanier's books, we will examine his relationship to the Scriptures, the Catholic Church and his position as a guide or spiritual master.

A spirituality of covenant? By choosing the word “covenant” as an angle of analysis, the way J. Vanier experiences the relation with the “poor” and God is revealed.

A spirituality of communion? The inflation of the word “communion” is clear, but its definition and application imply a lack of individuality, most likely inherited from T Philippe.

A “Carmelite” mystic? The mystic tone of J. Vanier’s writings reinforces the lack of individuality previously mentioned. The analysis of several excerpts from different books leads us to reach this conclusion.

A filiation with T Philippe? J. Vanier talks about Thomas Philippe in almost all his books. His loyalty leads him to try, in veiled terms, to prove T Philippe innocent and spread some of his ideas.

CHAPTER 21.

Jean Vanier: a new spiritual master?

Gwennola Rimbaut

First, it is worth looking at the features of J. Vanier’s writings before classifying them as “spiritual writings” Therefore, consideration should be given to the way he approaches biblical texts which are at the heart of any spiritual writing. Finally, we will question his relationship to the Catholic Church and then reflect on his position as a guide and spiritual master.

Characterization of Jean Vanier’s writings

The books we have read feature many differences and similarities that help us identify the specificity of these books.

DIFFERENCES

The target audience is not always the same. Some books are transcripts from “mainstream“ spiritual retreats (BNA) or for “assistants” (TST); other books are intended for the general public (MW, EPSS, JGL, DMJ...), while yet others clearly target a limited audience (YSCM), or the entire entity of people involved with the communities of L’Arche (CG), or young people (TBB).

His writing style evolves through time. In one of his first books (YSCM), we observe a contemplative style in which personal prayer alternates with the expression of his convictions.

The books arising from his preaching retreats (BNA, TST, WNOA) are more structured around the Scriptures, which are very often quoted and referred to in the beginning, progressively less in subsequent years.

The two editions of *La Communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête* (*Community and Growth*) consist of small units of thoughts collected under a theme, as if they were logbooks consolidating notes on a certain topic¹.

The two books about Jesus (JGL, DMJ) do not have an exegetic style. They emerge from personal meditation about the life of Jesus according to the Gospels, including the story of John relating the experience of the relationship with "wounded" people.

His anthropological books (MW, EPSS, BH) use a more classical structure to convey his thinking. However, it is surprising to note how he expresses his personal convictions with neither actual argumentative contributions nor comparison with other authors. This issue is partially corrected in *Les Signes des Temps* (*The Signs of the Times*) (STT) in which J. Vanier aims to defend the primacy of consciousness by relying on the Second Vatican Council.

The last book we read (OLT) consists essentially of "circular letters" sent by J. Vanier over the years. They reconstruct the history of L'Arche based on his travels and meetings with communities around the world. These letters are very factual and all quite similar, despite the variety of places and people he met.

These variations grab the reader's attention and make us wonder about J. Vanier. Was he struggling to find his way? What writing project can there be behind this profusion of genres? Is this simply a way of reaching out to various audiences? Or a way to renew his readers' interest? Whatever the case may be, it seems difficult to categorize this work if we only consider the differences. So, let's take a look at the features they have in common.

1. On this subject, the archives of King's College have preserved the drafts of retreats given by J. Vanier (Box 23). He proceeds by writing key words on a sheet of paper, either by opposing them (for example: watchful eye / judgmental stare) or by writing three words on the same line under an amplification process (for example: to approach / to receive without judgement / to identify with). So, his conferences are not written out in full. He delivers speeches based on these outlines, speaking about his personal beliefs and some memorized scriptural references. J. Vanier's charisma and presence, imperceptible in his writings, captivated his audiences during his speeches (an element attested through interviews carried out by the Commission).

COMMON FEATURES

An initial observation can be made about J. Vanier's constant claim of writing based on his personal life experience with people with disabilities. Bearing this in mind, all his books could be considered as testimonials with a few autobiographical elements. However, the writing of the work as a whole does not belong to the autobiographical genre, given that it does not present the progression of a life story¹.

Our second observation comes from his being rooted in a life of faith. J. Vanier, in all his books, claims to write as a disciple of Jesus, even on broader themes in relation with anthropology. His writing approach always features a testimony of his faith, with a mystic tone.

The third observation relates to the aspect of teaching and transmission of knowledge. J. Vanier not only writes to bear witness to his experience of life and faith, but he also writes to make disciples and find the new assistants he needs, due to the growing number of communities of L'Arche. Through his mystic dimension (cf. chap. 23), he encourages the enrolment of many new participants to assist "wounded"² people, whilst searching for disciples open to the spirituality he promotes (with T Philippe). He systematically makes a connection between Christian (Catholic) faith and the theme he explores. In addition, he tirelessly expresses his convictions, even if that means making numerous repetitions in each of his books, or from one book to another. The avid reader is often confronted with the same ideas!

At the heart of all of this, a strong point of reference is always emphasised: the closeness to life and caring for fragile, poor, and wounded people, allowing ourselves to be converted by them, personally and as a community (then as society as a whole). The connection is always

1. Can the autobiographical genre be defined? Authors do not concur on specific features, even though writing in the first person "I" is often the major clue, in addition to the retrospective narrative of an author's own existence. The *Encyclopædia Universalis* calls "autobiographical pact" the assertion in the text or even in its margins (subtitle, preface, interviews) [of a formal guarantee of the author's identity], regardless of the opinion that the reader might have about the truth or the reality of statements [...] » (T 3, 2008, p. 487).

2. This word is in quotation marks because it is part of Jean Vanier's typical vocabulary. He very often extends the group of people with mental disabilities to all those wounded in life.

related to the way Jesus lived, loved and chose mainly abandoned and marginalized people. This feature is more than an idea, it is a practice that Jean Vanier affirms through the existence of the communities of L'Arche and through his personal life. The whole credibility of his entire written work is based on this undeniable reality. In this regard, he is a true witness, consistent in word and deed.

Finally, his writing always seeks to be simple, without intellectual jargon, to keep in touch with societal trends. Jean Vanier knows how to relate to his contemporaries, as well as young people who aspire to the ideal of a fraternal, sober and truly evangelical life. He dares to think outside the traditional academic framework, using accessible references (e.g. Gandhi), exploring diverse cultures and religions, cultivating an ideal opposed to a world of competition, individualism and useless wealth. The success of Jean Vanier's books among widely diverse audiences is highly understandable given these elements.

Based on all their common features, these writings as a whole can be classified as "spiritual writings", even though they are eclectic and significantly different from other Christian spiritual authors. They show how to become a disciple of Jesus through being close with "wounded" people, and how Jesus can be an inspiration, even to readers who are neither believers nor Christians. Jesus is portrayed as a model for humanity as a whole. Even his anthropological reflections remain inspired by the biblical Revelation in its entirety.

What is J. Vanier's connection with the Holy Scriptures?

Connection with the Scriptures

Before addressing how J. Vanier interprets the Scriptures, let's take a look at the way he cited scriptural references, which evolved over time.

HIS EVOLVING WAY OF CITING THE SCRIPTURES

A change is noticeable in his writings. As time goes by, J. Vanier references specific biblical texts less and less. Instead, he cites them more and more implicitly. Thus, in 1978 (BNA), excerpts from the Scriptures are written *in extenso*; in 1984 (BNA), references are missing even when it comes to explicit quotations mentioned in quotation marks; in 1994

(BNA), in a book about the life of Jesus (hence about the Gospels), excerpts are occasional and referencing is often incomplete.

Why such a change? We could simply see it as a lack of time for this type of work, which requires tedious verification, given that J. Vanier was frequently travelling around the world. However, he had people to help proof his manuscripts and improve his writing (often translated from English). Therefore, it is a stance he took, a personal and deliberate choice. He makes it clear that he is permeated by the Scriptures and the Gospels, most especially the Gospel of John. In sum, what he says is enough.

VANIER'S SCRIPTURAL PREFERENCES

Looking at Jean Vanier's scriptural preferences is of interest. For instance, in *Ne crains pas (Be not afraid)* he quotes the Gospel of John more than thirty times, but the First Epistle of John only once; Matthew nine times; Luke eight times; Mark five times; Paul three times (twice the First Letter to the Corinthians and once the Letter to the Romans); and the Apocalypse three times. The Old Testament is mentioned seven times, including four times Ezekiel, two times Isaiah, and once Hosea.

We can obviously see his heavy favouritism towards John the Evangelist. This preference is subsequently confirmed with a book dedicated to him (DMJ, 2005).

As far as the Old Testament is concerned, the texts he selects refer to God's love like the love of a husband who reaches out to his neglected wife to win over her heart (cf. Isaiah 54:4-8 and Hosea 2:16-22), or like the effusion of the Holy Spirit who gives life (Ezekiel 37:5). The book title: *Ne crains pas (Be Not Afraid)*, corresponds to the first words of a quotation from Isaiah¹. They reflect a mystic attraction that will be discussed later on.

This preference remains very consistent in his work, especially as far as the Old Testament and the Gospel of John are concerned. We see them again in his books based on preached retreats, as well as many others.

1. Jean Vanier points out that "the accomplishment of every Scripture is this discovery that God loves humanity like a spouse" (BNA, 100).

AN UNFETTERED, PSYCHOLOGY-ORIENTED INTERPRETATION

When J. Vanier no longer quotes the full text of Scriptures, he is increasingly opting for a highly psychology-oriented and imaginative interpretation. This approach is particularly frequent among Christians when they freely share a passage from the Scriptures. But J. Vanier's influence calls for greater accuracy, especially in his proofed and corrected texts. J. Vanier considers his interpretations as being self-evident, instead of specifying that they are very subjective interpretations not to be taken literally! Inserting clauses such as "I imagine that", and more importantly, making his interpretations more ecclesial by cross-referencing different points of view, would have been sufficient. But he makes no references to any Bible scholar. He offers his own words as if they were canonical – and as a matter of fact, we couldn't find any editions of his books with critical revisions. Over time, his word comes to be considered as a canon. Thus, in one of his books, Bible scholar Pierre Coulange considers him to be among the spiritual authors who contributed an important commentary on the story of the *Samaritan Woman*. He summarises the contributions of St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, and then throws in those of J. Vanier.

When Jean Vanier describes the circumstances in which he took an interest in the Gospel of John and wrote down what he calls "meditative prose", he writes: "I became aware of the importance of The Gospel of John for the times we live in". The relevance of this comment reveals that he is deeply rooted in a life experience within the community of L'Arche, as he is in relation with people with mental disabilities. His understanding of the Samaritan woman's character is filled with striking realism and depth. [...] His interpretation contains profoundly moving details arising from his spiritual meditation. From a psychological standpoint, he shows how Jesus approaches this woman¹.

He completes his praise by restating the relevance of this approach. He mostly reveals the level of authority J. Vanier has gained! It is striking to see the way he is implicitly set on the same pedestal as these two revered Carmelite mystics, who also happen to be sources of inspiration for J. Vanier's mysticism (cf. chap 23).

1. Pierre COULANGE, *La Samaritaine : une invraisemblable rencontre* (The Samaritan Woman: An Improbable Encounter), Cerf, coll. Lectio Divina, 2020, p. 221-222.

IMAGINARY DETAILS ADDED TO BIBLICAL TEXT

When J. Vanier mentions scenes from the Gospels, he describes the conduct of Jesus and provides details that do not exist in the biblical narrative.

The adulterous woman

Our first example comes from *Le Corps Brisé (The Broken Body)* (TBB, 1989): the adulterous woman (Jn 8:1-11). Though the scriptural reference is omitted, he mentions this specific conduct of Jesus: "Jesus looked at her and loved her with tenderness" (TBB, 115). This contrasts with the evangelist's narrative, which describes Jesus bowing his head: he looks at the ground and makes markings in it. He straightens up when talking to people, but there is no mention of his gaze at all, contrary to other stories. Actually, in adding this element, J. Vanier's intention is to emphasize the tenderness of Jesus and God; he is generalising it here.

Then, he invents another ending to the narrative by saying: "She got back on her feet, ready to make her way home in order to reunify the broken body of her family" (TBB, 115). The narrative says none of that. The woman has always been standing in that scene, and the narrative ends with these words of Jesus: "Go, and from now on, sin no more". This invitation to conversion is transformed into an effective conversion in J. Vanier's mind.

Are these imaginary details changing the perspective of the evangelical narrative? J. Vanier puts the focus of this pericope on Jesus' tenderness towards a woman, which brings about her conversion. On the contrary, the evangelist focuses on Jesus' call on people (Pharisees, scribes, the adulterous woman) to make free use of their own conscience to find a path of justice without denying the significance of the Law¹. From our point of view, the biblical text is not considered in its true meaning by J. Vanier. He distorts the biblical text, to the advantage

1. Cf. Alain MARCHADOUR, "Venez et voyez" (Come and See), Bayard, 2011, p. 228-232. In the comment made by Charles L'EPLATTENIER, we find a longer explanation of the conduct of Jesus looking at the ground and drawing lines: *L'Évangile de Jean* (The Gospel of John), Labor et Fides, 1993, p.172-177. He insists in particular on making people act according to their own conscience. This does not make the Law a simple thing; on the contrary, this makes enforcing it more demanding and complex, for in Mt 5: 28, "Jesus condemns as adultery a simple lustful gaze" (p.175).

of his own thinking. This phenomenon is very often repeated in this book, and in many others as well¹.

The childhood narrative of Jesus

In *Jésus, don d'amour (Jesus, the Gift of Love)* (JGL), we would expect a more thorough scriptural perspective. However, J. Vanier rewrites most of Jesus' life, bit by bit, sometimes embellishing it with some invented additional elements. For example, the pages about Joseph's life, his reactions to the announcement of Mary's maternity and the birth of Jesus may be edifying to a certain audience, but dismaying for a theologian or Bible scholar. Here are some excerpts:

"[Following Joseph's dream] Mary, the beloved, and God's child were then given to him. He had to rush to Mary weeping for joy. As he embraced his beloved, Joseph also embraced the child hidden in her womb" (JGL, 47).

"How he, the Word made flesh, lived, prayed, worked, and celebrated with Joseph and with Mary remains a secret to be revealed in the Kingdom of Heaven. During her life, Mary kept all these things in her heart. How he lived the unity of the Trinity in the unity of the Holy Family, how he lived in communion, in a holy communion with his mother, remains hidden, shrouded in mystery. Just as the way he lived with the poor, the weak and the little, eating at the same table, in communion with them, remains hidden as well (JGL, 49)."

The first excerpt sets forth Joseph's emotional reactions and gestures of tenderness, whereas the biblical text says none of that. The evangelist Matthew presents Joseph's decision to obey the call he heard in pragmatic terms: to take Mary as his wife despite the fact that she is pregnant (Mt 1:24). J. Vanier does not contextualize these writings whatsoever; nor does he attribute value to this decision, which is exceptional given the mentality and culture of the time of Jesus. He disregards the difficulty of the decision and suggests instead what appears to be so important to him: tenderness and the physical expression of it.

We find this phenomenon of extrapolation at the end of the second excerpt, in which J. Vanier describes the life of Jesus in Nazareth before

1. Cf. the presentation of Peter the apostle (BNA, 33-34); Marie entrusted to John (BNA, 40); etc.

his public ministry (elements which are not in the Gospels). This period is especially inspirational to J. Vanier and he sees this spirituality of Nazareth at the heart of the communities of L'Arche¹. In this case, the excerpt highlights the dimension of a "secret" well "hidden" and "mystery". These words (recurrent in J. Vanier's writings) ultimately relate to a way of experiencing the "communion" between Jesus and his mother, instead of the communion of The Holy Trinity.

Today we know this relationship is at the centre of Fr Thomas' spirituality, in its incestuous form! Of course, J. Vanier refers only to a "divine communion" between Mary and Jesus, but we can highlight all of the vocabulary that maintains the mysterious atmosphere which makes it possible for the "initiated"² to understand this excerpt differently than other readers do. J. Vanier is not, however, in a gnostic³ system of thinking. His thinking aims to be accessible to the largest possible number of people, using simple language. Even so, at times he appears to slip into a sort of coded language that speaks more specifically to the "initiates": T Philippe's close relations who are familiar with his delirious mysticism (we will develop this point in chapter 5).

The end of the paragraph is also surprising, for it evokes Jesus' meals with the poor and the little people. None of that is taught by the Gospels. Either J. Vanier is generalising from the public life of Jesus, or he is directly addressing his "initiates" who call themselves "les tout-petits"⁴ ("the little ones"). Indeed, he could be playing with a possible interpretation of "little" in reference to the disciples of Jesus in

1. J. Vanier does make it clear that "the secret of L'Arche and the communities who live with the poor is specifically remaining little; their model is Nazareth, where Jesus spent thirty years of his life with Joseph and Mary, in the simplicity of love [...]" (TBB, 146). Such spirituality has also been developed within L'Eau Vive, and after it was closed down, to valorise the hidden life of T Philippe's disciples.

2. We will use the term "initiates" to refer to the people who supported the corrupted mystic of T Philippe.

3. Without going into details, Gnosticism consists of characteristics not found in J. Vanier: this is neither dualism, intellectual speculation nor anti-Judaism. The only point of convergence is the transmission of a secret received by divine revelation. Cf. the GNOSE (Gnosis) article in the *Dictionnaire critique de théologie* (Critical Dictionary of Theology) *op. cit.* quoted, p. 597-598. Pope Francis also evokes "the current Gnosticism" as a heresy in his exhortation *Gaudete et exultate*, March 19th, 2018, n° 36-46.

4. Cf. historical section, chap. 3, the presentation of the "tout-petits" ("little ones").

the Gospel of Matthew¹. The hidden life of the “initiates” would thus be in the image of Nazareth, a form of spirituality which T Philippe developed at L’Eau Vive².

Only readers aware of the condemnation of T Philippe and the content of the allegations, who know that J. Vanier considered him his spiritual father and gave him constant support, are able to unveil this subtext. Other readers will disregard this aspect, not noticing anything ambiguous. Most will enjoy its expression of spirituality, the advantages of which have been presented in the first part of this study.

Conclusion on this point:

J. Vanier frequently has a psychology-oriented approach which is not rigorous with regards to biblical texts³. We highly recommend that readers peruse these books on their own, since we can only provide a limited number of examples within the framework of this research⁴.

J. Vanier’s goal is to speak to the heart rather than to reason. He says this outright, which may explain his way of commenting on the Scriptures. We can only deplore his lack of articulation between faith

1. An exegetical debate took place regarding the word “petit” (little) (in Greek: *micros*) that we find in Mt 10:40 ; 18:5 ; 25:40. A similarity between these three texts has suggested that the “petits” (“little ones”) were indeed the disciples sent by Jesus. The position of the exegete Daniel Marguerat differs: he thinks that the three texts do not talk about the same people. In Mt 25:45 it refers to the poor and disadvantaged, while the other texts talk about disciples. In *Le Jugement dans l’Évangile de Matthieu* (Judgement in the Gospel of Matthew), Labor et Fides, 1981, p. 508-510.

2. Cf. in the historical section, chp.7, the evocation of Nazareth in a letter from T Philippe to J. Vanier (1960, APJV), and in the letter from Marise Hueber to J. Vanier (May 20th, 1959, APJV). Nazareth refers to a hidden life but also a life of pleasures.

3. This conclusion is close to the thinking of a Jesuit found in the interview No.110 (p. 6-7): “See, we had a Jesuit once here, who laughed at his interpretation of scripture [laugh]. Jean was so off base, he was so irresponsible theologically, scripturally. But his in[sigh]t, his intuition about Christ, the cosmic Christ, today we would say the cosmic Christ, the Christ energy that’s in us. [...] Christ consciousness. He knew, he knew this, but... and he relied totally on scripture. He read a lot of scripture in that first retreat. By the end, he never opened the scriptures. He just spoke of Scripture. By heart. But it was his interpretation, not of scripture, but of the, of the mind and heart of Christ. That’s what moved me, but it was the ‘stay in the chapel and you’ll meet Jesus’”.

4. We have conducted other surveys and have found the same issues when J. Vanier paraphrases the story of Lazarus (Lk 16, 19-35), the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15, 11-32) (cf. BH, 148-149).

and reason¹, between the heart and the mind, between a personal and an ecclesial approach. This difficulty explains, in part, where J. Vanier went adrift.

Speech is a powerful medium to spark new hope. It breaks constraints and habits in order to let rivers of living water flow. This is a nourishment giving strength and energy, but not just any speech. It has to be a speech which touches the heart; that is to say a speech not being abstract, neither coming from books nor appealing to reason, but a speech revealing faith, hope and love of the one who speaks (CG1, 141).

Finally, it is peculiar to see him cite the rules of interpretation to be followed in 2012 (TST, 155-156) – according to an Anglican theologian² – as if he wanted to prove that he had been faithful in that respect. Is referencing an Anglican theologian symptomatic of an ecumenical vision, or of cognitive distance from the Catholic Church? What evidence can we observe from J. Vanier’s relationship to the Church?

Relationship to the Catholic Church

Historical investigation sheds light on J. Vanier’s relationship to the institution of the Catholic Church. A number of points also emerge from his books: a certain silence about the Church; the occasional expression of a painful relationship with the Church as an institution; and despite this, the later affirmation that he belongs to what he calls “my Church”.

FIRST OBSERVATION: JEAN VANIER SAYS LITTLE ABOUT THE CHURCH

The fifteen books by J. Vanier that we read gave us an impression of distance with regards to the Catholic Church. This point is surprising, given that his life was very closely tied to the Catholic Church. He struck up many relationships with the episcopacy, priests, clergymen and nuns,

1. Cf. the psychiatric point of view about the abandonment of reason, chap 18, especially section 10.

2. He mentions in footnotes: D.F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007. This theologian is also quoted p. 129.

in the various countries where the communities of L'Arche¹ exist. Moreover, many of these books are prefaced by bishops. This impression needs to be qualified, since the books show an evolution through time. While in the early books the Church is rarely mentioned, it is significantly more present in later publications. We see this as a sign of appeasement in connection with the increasing popularity of L'Arche. As an example, the word Church is never mentioned – unless we are mistaken – in *Ton silence m'appelle* (Your Silence Is Calling Me) (1971); it is sometimes found in *Le Corps Brisé* (*The Broken Body*) (1989) in a plaintive tone (cf. following paragraph); there are brief references to the Church in the subsequent books, and finally, a comment showing personal attachment: the expression “my Church” in *Les Signes des Temps* (*The Signs of the Times*) (2012). Therefore, though the Church is not totally absent, it is so little present in J. Vanier's writings that a conclusion has to be drawn: it is obviously a topic to be avoided.

SECOND OBSERVATION: A PAINFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION.

The painful relationship with the Catholic Church can be clearly seen in *Le Corps Brisé* (*The Broken Body*) (TBB, 1989):

It is so painful when the institution seems to hide the source. It is so painful when the source itself does not seem to be able to flow on the dry land of our world anymore, and when the poor are no longer at the heart of the Church. The secret face of the Bride, the mystical Body is shining with light; but the human face of the Church is clouded (TBB, 137).

This painful feeling refers to several elements. The element that will be remembered most easily concerns the absence of the poor at the heart of the Church, namely in parish communities, in the concrete life

1. The archives of *King's College* contain many elements from the correspondence between J. Vanier and the bishops of these countries. Concept papers can also be found on the relation between L'Arche and the Catholic Church, about the role of the accompanying Bishop of L'Arche in each country, etc. (Box 29). A disparity therefore exists between the content of J. Vanier's books and these archives, which show how readily disposed he was to formalise bonds with the ecclesial institution, the significance of an ecclesial recognition and his wish that a priest be present in communities of L'Arche. This is not about his personal relationship, which is more perceptible in his books.

of the Church. This point is essential, it guides the whole life of J. Vanier and caused many to embrace his work.

Another element also causes suffering. It involves the other chapter of J. Vanier's life, that mysterious and secret mysticism, the source of which the Church as an institution blocks access. His books do not provide much more information about it; historians' research allows us to better identify the reasons for this pain: the condemnation of his spiritual father, and as a consequence, of all their mysticism; the opposition to his priestly ordination (because J. Vanier refused the instruction to spend at least one year in a seminary school, the place where diocesan priests are trained).

Subsequently, the Church is more often referred to, although still very little in the first version of *La Communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête* (*Community and Growth*) (1979). It is only slightly more quoted in the second, expanded edition (twenty years later), despite a new contribution on “the specific role of the priest or ordained minister” (CG2, 246-248). J. Vanier presents the priest in his role of spiritual guide presiding over the Eucharist. He also seeks better articulation between the spiritual and temporal, between priests and community leaders, by asking everyone to avoid seizing power. He further acknowledges that bishops rarely meet and supervise priests. He briefly mentions the bond of communion between priests and their diocese and the entire Catholic Church. In a skilful way, he relates the main objection to his repeated requests¹ to be ordained as a priest: “A priest is never ordained solely for the people of one community, but for the entire universal Church” (CG2, 247). Is he really so convinced of that²?

FINALLY, AN EXPRESSION OF ATTACHMENT: “MY CHURCH”

The expression “my Church” is used for the first time in a 2012 book: *Les Signes des Temps* (*The Signs of the Times*). It is used twice in a single passage of text with which many people will agree.

1. Cf. in the historical section, the entire chap. 13.

2. The testimony of a priest, ordained by Mgr. Desmazières, shows relevantly J. Vanier's difficulty to accept that some priests cannot be ordained only for L'Arche but remain diocesan priests sent to L'Arche, under the supervision of their bishop (cf. no. 88, his transcript from 00 : 58').

It is through the Church that Jesus called me to bring good news to the poor and proclaim the liberation of those who are captive and oppressed. I am grateful to *my Church* for the nourishment of the sacraments, for the word of God and the inspiration given by the successor to Peter. [...] However, I am disappointed by the loss of allegiance and enthusiasm among members of *my Church* which makes it hard for them to commit themselves to the poor to bring them the good news of Jesus. Too few ecclesiastical officials affirm that faith in Jesus is intimately bound to this commitment to the poor (TST, 15-16).

Later in the text, he uses the expression again and expands it: “the love of my Church”. Here we are in the introduction of the book; the following chapters do not develop this sense of belonging, which mostly seems to express solidarity with a Church shaken by scandals involving paedophilia among certain priests¹. J. Vanier mentions this point with accuracy: “An act of paedophilia, whether committed by a family member, a teacher, a priest or a psychotherapist is always an abuse of power and trust” (TST, 41). J. Vanier’s remark demonstrates his lucidity on possible abuse in a relationship of authority or trust. He said he “listened to people sexually abused in their childhood” (TST, 132) and did not understand Christians who refuse to believe in sexual abuses perpetrated by people of the Church. With his own words, he maintains a significant difference between paedophile crimes and those committed by T Philippe, and to a lesser extent, by himself. He demonstrates a form of unconsciousness or denial with respect to the abuse they themselves committed in their position of spiritual authority.

Furthermore, the tone of passages about the Catholic Church becomes criticism on many levels: ritualism, especially as far as the Eucharist is concerned (cf. TST, 135); the fear of having the Church’s reputation called into question and therefore the propensity to hide the problematic situations of some priests or clergyman (cf. TST, 44-45); the difficulty of entering into dialogue with people distancing themselves from the official doctrine; the lack of closeness that most of the people from the Church have with the “poor”. J. Vanier emphasizes all of this by making parallel references to great people of the Church:

1. On March 19th, 2010, Benoit XVI’s pastoral letter to Irish Catholics was published following this scandal.

Pierre Claverie (a Church of humility advocating for the poor), Timothy Radcliffe (for his capacity for dialogue), etc. But he doesn’t forget to talk about himself! He introduces himself with an attitude focused on listening, meeting and dialoguing with those wounded by life, humiliated, or even sexually abused. This position makes us feel very uncomfortable today. Hypocrisy or denial? It is up to psychologists and psychiatrists to answer that.

Conclusion on this point: Despite the number of books he wrote, we observe no true reflection on the Church and too few references to his ecclesial attachment, which remains essentially critical.

Such an observation, which will be visible to any careful reader, remains significant, even though it concerns the Church as a hierarchical institution. J. Vanier also suggests the idea of a universal Church open to all of humanity, since Jesus can speak to everyone’s heart. His Church, the one he loves, is actually L’Arche, the “wounded” people whom he identifies with Jesus himself, and those who answer the call to tend closely to the “poor”. This specific Church needs priests so that the announcement of The Gospel and celebration of the Eucharist¹ shape the way of living in community. They are also necessary for the spiritual accompaniment of community members, even though lay people can also fulfil this role, J. Vanier in particular.

1. As regards the significance of the rite of the washing of the feet disseminated by J. Vanier within L’Arche, many hypotheses would need to be verified. This rite can reflect the desire for a universal symbolism by insisting on the authority of service (an approach supported by the comments he makes in his book about the Gospel of John: DMJ, 230-248, and the additional comments made on this point in CG2, 212-214). Such a rite can anticipate difficulties in celebrating the Eucharist due to the lack of priests in certain countries and foster more liturgical creativity. It can also help accentuate the role of “touching” in the practices of L’Arche as a token of love (cf. DMJ, 210-211 about Mary who anoints Jesus’ feet). We do not have enough elements in the books read to conclude with certainty.

His position as a spiritual guide and master

Not a single book neglects to mention the necessity of being spiritually and humanely accompanied. J. Vanier regularly performs this role with the people he meets, but he does not stop there: he introduces himself as a spiritual master.

JEAN VANIER'S VOCABULARY

On the subject of vocabulary, J. Vanier only later uses the word "accompanier", which is normal since the expression is recent and its use is well documented only after the Second Vatican Council¹. J. Vanier assumes this change little by little. In the beginning, he maintains the oldest vision of the spiritual director, who in his writing becomes a "spiritual father" and a "spiritual guide". He also likes to talk about the "spiritual counsellor", the "shepherd" and the "witness". For instance, T Philippe is almost always introduced as his "spiritual father". He will be appointed "accompanier" in 1999 (BH). All these words indicate, in theory, very different positions: either a directive attitude or, on the contrary, a very discreet attitude (the role of witness). J. Vanier actually evokes various ways of living the accompaniment.

The accompaniment as a "filiation"

J. Vanier has a predilection for a "filiation"-like accompaniment, which is clearly expressed in *la Communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête (Community and Growth)*, as from 1979.

"In some religious communities, I hear a lot of people talking about training. I wonder whether there should be more talks about "filiation". [...] But some spiritual knowledge can only be shared by filiation" (CG1, 105).

This emphasis corresponds to his own experience of a filial relationship with T Philippe. He is attracted by the Indian tradition of gurus who train their disciples through close ties and lengthy assimilation. The gurus are "models" (CG1, 106). This is therefore a matter of gradually entering a way of being and thinking. That is why community life fosters this filiation.

1. Cf. Claude FLIPO, "Accompagnement", *Dictionnaire encyclopédique d'éthique chrétienne* ("Accompaniment", Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Christian Ethics), Cerf, 2013, p.23-30 : article available online at: https://www.diocese49.org/IMG/pdf/dict_encyclo_ethique_chretienne_fevrier2013_accompagnement_spirituel.pdf

The accompanier as a "guide"

When people are young (for instance, teenagers) or unstable (this is the case for many people arriving at L'Arche), J. Vanier evokes the need to guide them at various levels: intellectual and spiritual, along with a notion of discipline to help them grow up. The guide must be both a model and a witness. His role appears to be large: helping a person to find his or her own ideal of life and structure on a human level. The dimension of a "guide" that fosters growing faith in God and Jesus may appear but not systematically.

J. Vanier is not opposing these two ways of considering the accompaniment. He also states that T Philippe was his "guide" (EPSS, 120) when, after having given up his career in the navy, he tried to confirm his vocation to join the presbyterate. This moment was delicate, full of uncertainties and ignorance: meeting a good "guide" was necessary. In his own practice of accompaniment, he certainly used these two "modes" depending on people and circumstances. "Filiation" was easier to establish within the communities of L'Arche, whereas "guidance" was for outsiders or people looking for occasional meetings.

These two modes may involve risks:

- "Filiation" may lack openness if everything is carried out within L'Arche and may sometimes be confused with functional relationships. In that case, where is the effective space for freedom?
- "Guidance" may become too directive with the illusion of helping the person, if the spiritual guide thinks he knows the path that person should follow¹...

1. It should be noted that T Philippe had this kind of position with respect to J. Vanier when he wrote to him and told him that Mary had chosen him to...

Only the survey conducted among people accompanied by J. Vanier can show what it was like¹. As far as we are concerned, his inconsistency in using these terms suggests a confusion regarding his position, which may have opened the door to deception².

JEAN VANIER, A "SPIRITUAL MASTER"?

J. Vanier's position as a spiritual guide is quite clear, given the number of people who turned to him. Furthermore, he accompanied many people on an irregular basis during the retreats he preached.

His position as a "spiritual master" proves to be very real. On the one hand, he has written a lot in this spiritual field. On the other hand, he also tried to develop a new and personal form of spiritual teaching.

This novelty could be related to his filiation to T Philippe and therefore, to the desire to promote this "new"³ thinking. We have already pointed out some signs of it, and this will become clearer in the following chapters. Yet, on a mystic and theological level, his main reference remains his spiritual father. As far as the spirituality of commitment with "wounded" people is concerned, J. Vanier remains in a very traditional and fundamental approach in the Catholic Church, while developing his own universalist vision. The question remains whether these two approaches do not mingle at some point, negatively influencing the conception of commitment with people with disabilities.

J. Vanier, surprisingly, suggests a path of spiritual liberation in seven steps (BH, 168-179). This writing dates back to 1999, a number of years after T Philippe's death. He begins by referring to Buddhist and Christian

1. Cf. in the sociological section, the presentation of J. Vanier's multiform accompaniment, chap 12.

2. Cf. Guy LE BOUEDEC, Titoun LAVENIER and Luc PASQUIER, *Les Postures éducatives* (Educational Postures), L'Harmattan, 2016. Chapter IV, "La posture d'accompagnement" (The accompaniment posture), refers to the structure of covenant experienced in mentoring and the possibility of imposture when accompaniment is undefined (p.83-101). A summary chart of educational postures and their characteristics (including drifts) is very instructive (p.29).

3. Thomas Philippe himself and his advocates thought they were the initiators of a new theology, a new anthropology, for a new era of Christianity. Cf. Xavier Le PICHON's report on the place of Father Thomas Philippe in the establishment of L'Arche, 10th May 2016. (Report available on the internet <https://mariedominique-philippe.com.files.wordpress.com/2019/11/>)

spiritual masters, noting that they suggest paths to liberation in a progression. He follows by doing the same, implicitly identifying himself with spiritual masters, people having in-depth knowledge of spiritual paths and who are able to offer new changes within a religious tradition¹. What is the content of the seven steps he mentions?

The first step is experiencing fear, which is said to be a "good adviser" as it forces people to think; the second is "the awareness of our own limitations and blockages"; the third involves "looking for wisdom in unexpected" and "tragic events"; the fourth one leads us to seek an accompanier who can be a friend, a parent or anyone else; the fifth consists of identifying, in one's surrounding community, a person who is a "model" to be followed; the sixth is to take up the fight against our selfishness in order to "live in truth, justice, and service"; the seventh and last step is discovering "communion with the source of the universe, God" and "the ecstasy of the heart".

Seven is the number leading to divine plenitude. J. Vanier is inspired by the mystic tradition: there are seven mansions in *The Interior Castle*² described by Teresa of Avila, seven steps in the ladder of spiritual love in Ruysbroeck's work³... However, the six steps described prior to the mystic union are very different from these authors, especially St John of the Cross, a spiritual master often quoted⁴ by J. Vanier.

This way of thinking, mainly based on psychology, makes the role of accompaniment central and the accompanier a model, which is not risk-free! Such progression is not centred on Jesus Christ, and seems to be

1. Authenticity criteria are existing to identify a spiritual master. Cf. Jacques BROSE, *Les Maîtres spirituels* (The Spiritual Masters), Albin Michel, 2005. To sum up: complete material disinterestedness; not pretending to be a master but being recognized by the community circle and often having a filiation to a spiritual master who appoints his successor; being indifferent to external judgements in order to only be the instrument of eternal Wisdom. "His mission is to guide other people on the path he himself followed", p. 13-14.

2. Cf. Teresa of Avila, *Œuvres complètes* (Complete Works) Cerf, 1995, p. 953-1164.

3. Cf. *Les Sept Degrés de l'échelle d'amour spirituel* (The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love), Artège, 2015.

4. John of the Cross' book most quoted by J. Vanier is *Vive Flamme d'amour* (Living Flame of Love). It already corresponds to the final union, but J. Vanier totally omits *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, which indicates all the steps of the necessary purifications. Cf. St John of the Cross, *Œuvres complètes* (Complete Works), DDB, 2016 (3rd edition).

intended for anyone, in a universalist vision. This questions the final ecstasy and union to God; what is its nature? What God do we find there?

Here we discover yet another side of J. Vanier: his desire to promote a different type of mystical path, most likely to distance himself from T Philippe's teachings and, in effect, from the Catholic tradition.

Conclusion

Perhaps J. Vanier wishes to open the path to a universal mysticism, whatever the religions and cultures may be. Such a spirituality could therefore be suggested in all the communities of L'Arche. This desire for universalism remains a defining characteristic that makes him venture off the beaten track.

This proposal may remain attractive on an intuitive level, but what it reflects above all is how unconscious he is of the intellectual and spiritual limits of his words. His transformation of the steps described by mystic authors is totally ungrounded and disregards an essential point of mystic life, above all else the purification of the senses and sensuality. We will need to take up this subject again when we elaborate upon J. Vanier's mystical background (cf. chap 23).

Representing the accompanier as a model remains at the heart of his thinking, and the accompaniment is essentially considered as a "filiation", which keeps spiritual transmission at the heart of a personal relationship between the accompanier and the accompanied. It does not exclude real attention to the action of God in the accompanied, in the more discreet role of witness, but the tendency is to overvalue the role of the accompanier.

There is no doubt that J. Vanier wanted to consider himself a spiritual author, a spiritual accompanier and a spiritual master. He wore two hats, one as the founder of L'Arche and the other as a man bringing forth a new form of spirituality – all the while maintaining its central core of closeness to the "wounded". His path appears to move away, little by little, from the path of T Philippe. But to what extent?

Our investigation continues with a deep dive into the spirituality of covenant as experienced within L'Arche.

CHAPTER 22. A spirituality of covenant?

Gwennola Rimbaut

Some assistants of L'Arche "announce the covenant"¹ to confirm their decision to stay within the community of L'Arche for the coming years, or even indefinitely. The narrative behind this type of commitment is not mentioned by J. Vanier in his books, but it is found within the internal documents of L'Arche. A deep reflection has been conducted on this point². The first assistants who made their commitment did so during a retreat preached by M.-D. Philippe in 1978, during a Eucharistic celebration. Subsequently, it took place during a liturgical rite including the "washing of the feet". This commitment is neither a sacrament nor a consecration, which would entail entering in the consecrated life as defined by the canonical law of the Catholic Church. It is, however, important for people because it cements a community-oriented life with people with disabilities, within a relationship of closeness, specifically qualified as a covenant. This can also be experienced on a more personal level and focused on the relationship with God³.

1. Expression usually used in L'Arche.

2. An international commission for the Covenant was created in 1981, and then an international commission for the Spirituality of L'Arche in 1989. In 1981, J. Vanier and Thomas Philippe wrote texts which have been used as a reference regarding the way to live this commitment. They can be found in the booklet "Alliance" (Covenant) (cf. Box 21, B42)- A new booklet: "L'Alliance dans l'Arche" (The Covenant in L'Arche), was published internally in 1993 (cf. Box 21 - B5).

3. Point emphasized by the documents mentioned in the previous footnote.

In any case, the reality of the covenant lies within the history of L'Arche until the year 2000¹ and J. Vanier insists, in a book, on the need to make this commitment without delay.

“Attention should be paid not to allow much time to elapse between the recognition of the bonds or the covenant and the decision. That would be the best way to miss an opportunity and go the wrong way!” (CG1, 41).

It would therefore be normal to find numerous references and developments on this reality of a covenant, which structures the life of the communities of L'Arche and which is a major theme for speaking about the connection between God and all of humanity. However, that is not the case; the covenant is mostly obscured by the vocabulary of communion (cf. following chapter). The essential references here are to the first edition of the book *La Communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête* (1979) (*Community and Growth*) and to the book based on content of a covenant retreat, *La Source des larmes* (The Source of Tears) (2001), where we find matter for serious thought. It should be noted that this book was written based on the notes of a woman on a spiritual retreat, reviewed and approved by J. Vanier². Given the significance of the commitment, it is surprising to see that J. Vanier is not so eager to publish a text entirely dedicated to him. Perhaps he thought that an internal publication of the retreat preached by M.-D. Philippe³ was sufficient and could be used as a reference. Furthermore, many covenant retreats were subsequently organised and given by different participants of L'Arche according to the internal orientations for which J. Vanier as well as T Philippe⁴ wrote texts. Let's try to show the specific definition J. Vanier gives to this notion of covenant through these two books.

1. The list of the people having pledged their commitment has not been updated after the year 2000.

2. The initiative of the publication does not directly come from J. Vanier but from Anne-Sophie Andreu. She transcribed her retreat notes which were later reviewed and approved by J. Vanier (cf. preface of *La Source des larmes* (The Source of Tears)).

3. *Une Alliance à vivre avec le pauvre* (A Covenant to Be Experienced with the Poor) (introduction by J. Vanier), Trosly-Breui, ed.: “Les chemins de l'Arche-La Ferme”, 1981.

4. These texts have been written for the International Council of L'Arche of March 1981. It is worth noting that the dimension of nuptial mystic is missing here, even though communion is valorised with the formation of the heart.

In his first edition (CG1, 39-69), the second chapter is entitled “Entre dans l'alliance”¹ (Enter into the Covenant!). This edition is presented as an interdependence experienced between an assistant and a disabled person, each supporting the other in an especially emphasised reciprocity. This mutual covenant allows one to love and to let oneself be loved, to welcome the weakness of others as well as our own. It becomes a “real commitment” when it manages to overcome the hardship of reality, thereby becoming a lasting commitment.

This presentation, centred on reciprocity, not only erases the idea of asymmetry – mostly present in the covenant relationship between God and humans – but also the differences between members. This echoes the feeling of surprise expressed by some witnesses who declared not having been able to immediately identify who the assistant or the core member was. This vagueness probably does not last for long when confronted with the reality of disability, but it invites us to believe that the fundamental equality between people was emphasised in the communities of L'Arche. It rests on the inalienable dignity of each individual and this is a point always emphasized in J. Vanier's teachings. He particularly insists on God's call to being rather than doing. The covenant bond is to be found in the concept of “being”, even though taking actions remains significant. This emphasis is highly relevant, as the temptation of contrary action pesters everyone, to the detriment of the faithful and benevolent attention necessary to remain in covenant with people.

It would have been fortunate if J. Vanier had clearly defined the features of this covenant bond and identified this bond with respect to the diversity of biblical covenants. From the covenant made with Noah, Abraham or Moses... to the one fulfilled with Jesus Christ, many elements change, while others remain. Furthermore, J. Vanier expands the covenant in many directions: with God, between assistants, between assistants and people with disabilities, and even applies it in a wider sense to the neighbourhoods in which the communities of L'Arche are located. This expansion calls for making distinctions in the way of living the covenant with each different category of members.

1. In the second edition cf. “Le cheminement vers l'alliance” (Walking towards the covenant), p. 67-86.

Overall, it seems to us that two main models of covenant emerge in J. Vanier's spirituality: the first one is Christological and evokes the relationship with the "poor", and the other one is nuptial and talks about the intimate relationship of the believer with God.

Christological model of the covenant with the "poor"

To illustrate the community relationships within L'Arche between assistants and people with disabilities, J. Vanier evokes the covenant between Jesus Christ and the poor. More specifically, in the two editions of the CG, the emphasis is placed on the way the poor identify with Jesus, without developing the renewed covenant in Jesus Christ between God and humanity. He focuses explicitly on the text of the Last Judgement of the Gospel of Matthew (25:31-46), which says:

Jesus is the starving, the parched, the prisoner, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the dying. Jesus is the oppressed, the poor. To live with Jesus is to live with the poor. To live with the poor is to live with Jesus (CG1, 45).

[Jesus] calls his disciples not only to serve the poor but to discover Him as being really present in them, and through them, to meet with the Father. Jesus tells us that he is hidden on the face of the poor, that He truly is the poor (CG2, 97).

Here we can see a true rooting in the Gospel and within the tradition maintained by all Christians, as Pope Francis expressed it in this recent message:

In short, believers, when they want to see Jesus in person and touch him with their hands, know where to turn. The poor are a sacrament of Christ; they represent his person and point to him¹.

However, it should be noted that J. Vanier slips into an essentialisation of the poor as a Christ figure – as Jesus himself. As a matter of fact, the second quotation (mentioned above, CG2, 97) is part of a section entitled "Jesus is the poor". This expression differs from the one used by Pope Francis and Catholic Theology: "The poor are the sacrament of Christ".

1. Message for the 5th World Day of the Poor, November 14th, 2021. (<https://www.vatican.va/>)

The term "sacrament" allows a distinction to be maintained. J. Vanier's approach has the benefit of emphasizing the dignity of people in a state of poverty through total assimilation with Jesus, but raises a real issue: it does not respect people's individuality¹.

Indeed, does the face of the person retain its substance beneath the face of Jesus? Does the person involved feel loved for who he or she is, if Christ is at the forefront? The identification presented by the evangelist Matthew does exist, but it needs to be understood in the right context: it is through concrete acts of love towards the most deprived that we are able to meet Jesus Christ, whose presence is always before us because of his active compassion. Everything we can do to help a person in need has therefore an impact on God, because it is He, first and foremost, who suffers in compassion!

Recognizing that the poor can make Christians discover the profound love of God, especially revealed in Jesus, does not eliminate individuality. Irreducible differences exist between people, between Jesus and any human being, between God and all of humanity. The poor themselves do not reveal Jesus; what they first reveal is the pernicious condition of our society and our selfishness! However, the act of compassion can deepen faith in God. Our understanding of God's compassion for the "wounded" human being purifies and transforms faith. Moreover, within the act of compassion experienced outside of the Christian faith, a true closeness with God takes place by sharing his love of humanity. This ethical gesture does have a theological dimension in itself, even without becoming a confession of faith. The simplification adopted by J. Vanier "Jesus is the poor" – or the other way round, "the poor are Jesus" – should be avoided.

Yet J. Vanier's written work also includes some very beautiful passages. Jesus is very often described in his closeness to the poor, in the way he communicates the Father's preferential love for them. Jesus' compassion towards those who suffer is highly emphasised in all his books². These elements refer to a privileged covenant between God and

1. The expression "the sacrament of the poor" is used by J. Vanier, exceptionally when quoting Benedict XVI (TST, 60). It is not part of his own vocabulary.

2. For example, TBB, p. 54-55; JGL, p. 53-66.

the poor, and they justify the idea of a covenant to be lived within L'Arche between the assistants and people with disabilities.

Therefore, the sole difficulty lies in the radicalisation of identifying the "poor" as Jesus, because if a member of the covenant disappears under the face of another, the reality of the covenant collapses. It is thus interesting to look at the problematic repercussions of this concept through three themes: the deletion of the singularity of suffering, the disappearance of the person's own identity and the sacralisation of the body.

THE TEMPTATION TO ERASE THE SINGULARITY OF PERSONAL SUFFERING

We often noticed, in J. Vanier's work, a propensity to erase difference, the singularity of people's suffering, when it becomes identical to the suffering of Jesus.

Their pain is his pain,
 their loneliness is his loneliness,
 their cry for love is his cry for love (JGL, 66).
 No barriers were built to protect his vulnerability.
 [...] It is still so close to anguish and agony,
 and to the tears of loneliness (TBB, 54).

The expressions mentioned¹ above lead to confusion, since any suffering is unique. No one, not even Jesus, a true man, as well as a true God for Christians, can pretend to experience exactly the same suffering as others. Seeing and being profoundly gut-wrenched by compassion are two typical features of Jesus in the Gospels. They reveal his ability to let himself be affected and wounded by the suffering of others, which is not the same as experiencing identical suffering. The painful dimension of the compassionate being is thereby very real but this pain remains distinct and different from the one that causes it. If "Jesus is compassion"², a very accurate expression to qualify God's love revealed through the entire life of Jesus, it remains essential to maintain the singularity of each person's suffering.

1. These expressions also reflect the text of Isaiah 53 entitled "The Suffering Servant". He "carried", "bore" our sufferings (53, 4). The Suffering Servant has always been the inspiring figure to talk about Jesus Christ's passion. The terms used in Isaiah do not refer to one same suffering but to solidarity in suffering.

2. Title of a section included in TBB, p.54.

One question arises: is this tendency to level distinctions found in the accompaniment of people with disabilities? Assistants are called to listen to the suffering of others, but in J. Vanier's writings, it is clear that they do not have the same suffering as the core members. They do their best to carry it with their own fragility, with trusting love.

Yes, L'Arche is based on suffering, not only to try to eliminate the causes of this suffering – we cannot always do that – but to support the one who suffers and love him or her. And if we support the one who suffers, if we try to understand him or her, if we help him or her, if we love him or her, his/ or her suffering will be less heavy to bear and will transform (TST, 170).

Thus, when J. Vanier shifts from the framework of Christian faith to that of human relationships, he gives up identification and promotes a fair distance towards the suffering of others. This knowledge does not eliminate a common ground of suffering in all human beings caused by the desire to be loved, by profound solitude or even by existential anxiety (highly emphasized in his writings).

Recognizing this alleviates the fear of misconduct in the accompaniment of people with disabilities. Further research should be done on J. Vanier's position towards human suffering, for through his attempts to make sense of it, he continues to see it as sacrificial¹. But there are obviously other ways to approach this major issue.

What about the temptation of erasing the personality of people with disabilities?

THE TEMPTATION OF ERASING THE PERSONALITY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In all of his books, J. Vanier gives the names of people with disabilities and draws portraits of them which are extremely succinct, to the point of being – let's admit it – particularly poor. They are almost faceless, as if their main function was to reflect the face of the Christ or valorise L'Arche's work. For instance, the two people with whom Jean lived and founded the first community of L'Arche (Raphaël and Philippe) are mentioned in almost all the introductions of his books, yet

1. Here, we can notice an explicit proximity with John Paul II's thinking. He further refers to the apostolic letter *Salvifici doloris*, February 1984 (cf. (MW, 167).

the singularity of their experiences before and after their arrival at L'Arche are not given any substance. Even if the idea is to respect their personal privacy, their lives as individuals fade out behind the life of Jesus Christ. This is in contradiction with the project of L'Arche, which is to develop the life and creative potential of each core member. This point may seem false to some people who lived within L'Arche¹, but its perspective is connected to the way J. Vanier expresses his Christian faith. We find a gap between the way J. Vanier's conceived the actual project of L'Arche and his personal relationship to people.

Whether we live in L'Arche, whether we are friends of L'Arche, member of the administrative council or priest of the community, we benefit from a great privilege, which is being close to Luisito, Claudia, the little and the poor of this world, and being able to physically touch Jesus. For this is the mystery, this is the secret of the Gospel: Luisito makes Jesus physically present (TST, 19).

The expressions "physically touch Jesus" and "Luisito makes Jesus physically present", used during a covenant retreat, truly radicalise the identification of Jesus as the poor by insisting on his physical presence. The person with a disability becomes a sacrament of Jesus' presence, through the idea of a true or substantial, "real presence". We recognize the significance of valuing the presence of Jesus in the most fragile of people and communicating his faithful, unwavering presence among them. This presence speaks to the Christian, leads him to come and discover neighbourly love with the help of God. Here, J. Vanier takes the risk of giving up the reality of fraternal love by going directly to God's love, Jesus Christ's love. This trend is not permanent, since many pages describe the difficulty of encountering and living with "wounded" people in the long run. We are obliged to conclude that his faith disconnects him from reality, whereas his thinking as founder of L'Arche is, in contrast, anchored in a much more realistic and empirical logic. This is at least a question to be asked.

1. The interviews conducted by the members of the Commission point out the significance of relationships, without making use of this identification with Jesus Christ. Cf. for instance, interview no. 106: "Jean considered the person as a person and not as a problem. And I was really surprised", p.2.

This erasure of the singularity of suffering and the individuality of people themselves is paradoxically accompanied with a form of sacralisation of the body.

THE RISKS OF SACRALISING THE "POOR" AND THEIR BODIES

Along with the essentialised identification of the poor as Jesus, there is an insistence on "physicality" and "touching". This forces us to question more deeply the role assigned to the body of people with disability.

J. Vanier shows intelligence in assigning a positive role to the body. He is far from the depreciation carried out for centuries by Christianity, which strayed from biblical anthropology before returning to it through contemporary exegetical, patristic and philosophical research¹. And yet, he does not seem to root himself in these elements, relying instead on two specific and closely related points: his spirituality and his vision of the mother-child (infant) relationship.

The idealisation² of the mother-child (infant) relationship constantly appears in his writings. We will come back to it more specifically while evoking his other fundamental concept of "communion" (cf. following chapter).

The place of the body in J. Vanier's spirituality – the one accessible in his books – is revealed in various excerpts regarding Jesus and Mary.

His words are important, but more important still is his person, his heart and his body. It was his body, not just his intelligence, that radiated the perfection of divine energy. It was in his body, a channel perfectly open to grace, that he was full receptivity to the power and love of the Father (TBB, 50).

In order to welcome the gift of the body of Jesus, we must look more fully at the Woman who conceived him, who gave birth to him: Mary. Nobody enveloped his body, touched it, loved it, washed it, venerated it like her. The body of Christ was born from her own body, it is the fruit of her womb.

1. We can refer to, for instance, the article "âme-cœur-corps" (soul-heart-body) in Jean-Yves LACOSTE (dir.), *Dictionnaire critique de Théologie* (Critical Dictionary of Theology), Quadrige/PUF, 2007 (1st ed. 1998), p. 31-41.

2. The term "idealisation" needs to be justified, J. Vanier speaks about the "significance" of this relationship in the introduction of his book, *Jesus, the Gift of Love*: "Some of my interpretations flow obviously from my knowledge of human beings, the anthropology I have learnt over the years, and the knowledge I have of the significance of the mother-child relationship in the development of a person towards maturity. (p. 16).

The body of Mary nourished the body of Jesus: her breasts gave him the milk necessary for his growth. Her touch protected him and revealed to him that he was loved. [...] For thirty years she was close to his body, she fed it, and she was herself nourished by his presence, his real presence. For thirty years she was unified and sanctified by the tenderness and silence of the body of Jesus (TBB, 74).

Some kind of reciprocity is emphasized between these two bodies, Mary's body and Jesus' body. The body becomes a spiritual element in itself through a eucharistic vocabulary (gift of the body, "real presence", food...). Without even trying to make a direct connection with T Philippe's deviant marital spirituality, we need to point out what is obvious here to any reader: an overvalued vision of the body, "a channel perfectly open to grace" (for Jesus and by extension the "poor" or any disciple who follows Christ) and of touch. This role of the body, beneficial at first, becomes the vector of all possible excesses if we do not use our discernment to qualify it. Yet, J. Vanier does no such thing when he talks about touching the bodies of people with disabilities.

Mary held in her arms a little child who was her God. In this there is a mystery about the Body of Jesus, a mystery of touching which I understood a bit better by touching Eric's body, by washing him, holding him with respect and tenderness, because his body was the temple of God. I talked to him, but he was deaf and did not hear me, therefore my gestures were a way of communicating with him. At L'Arche, we are very sensitive to this mystery of the Body of Jesus, since many men and women of L'Arche do not understand speech (TST, 179).

The figure of Eric is also present in his book *Toute personne est une histoire sacrée* (Every Person Is a Sacred Story) (1994) to illustrate the role of touching, especially during bathing, in the accompaniment of people with disabilities.

I discovered that bathing was a special moment of communion. His little naked body was relaxing and taking pleasure in the warm water. He was so happy to be touched and bathed. The only language he could understand was tenderness through hands: a language of gentleness, safety, but also a language that through my body and its vibrations precisely revealed to him that he could be loved, that he was good, and that I was happy with him. By touching him, I received the tenderness he wanted to give to me (EPSS, 55).

We should not deny the significance of touching, but we should keep it in mind that all these practices require discernment and professional review in order to prevent unverifiable and over-subjective interpretations. The more severe the disability is, the more multiple cross-checking is necessary. Here we observe a dangerous spiritualisation and the presence of elements conducive to many types of abuse. Fortunately, to date, our commission has not reported any abuse on people with disabilities.

Still, it is surprising to see a lack of further study on the "touching" of Jesus within the work of J. Vanier. Since Jesus, on the contrary, exercises great caution¹ and only in very rare instances allows himself to make a physical gesture. Even the scene of the disciples' washing of the feet is not centred on touching (moreover, the verb used is "drying"); it instead focuses on the reversal of roles: the master becomes servant. In any case, the touch of Jesus liberates speech, even when he gives the order to be quiet. It is impossible to remain quiet about the healing and liberation offered by God through Jesus. Words of gratitude spring forth, instead of being impeded as in the case of abuse.

Does the model of the nuptial covenant with God reveal less ambiguity?

Model of the Nuptial covenant with God

The nuptial aspect is surprising when referring to the Covenant with God, not due to its absence from the Scriptures, but because it is neither at the forefront nor predominant. On the other hand, it represents a constant through-line in J. Vanier's spirituality, especially when considering his mystic vision (cf. chap 23).

In his book based on a covenant retreat (TST), only one quotation from the Old Testament can be found: the prophet Hosea (Hos 2:16.20.21). Whereas usually, the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel are quite appropriately included by J. Vanier to insist on the promise of the "new Covenant" in Jesus Christ. The emphasis is therefore centred on the intimate and personal gift of the divine Covenant which regenerates

1. Marie-Laurence WEYRON's viewpoint, *Le toucher dans les Évangiles* (Touching in the Gospels), Cerf, 2013.

human beings. By relying solely on Hosea, J. Vanier reveals his deep adhesion to nuptial spirituality. His vision of the Covenant is completed by nuptials.

The text begins with the call "I will lead her into the desert", and ends with the engagement with God, as "knowing Yahweh" does not mean having simple theoretical knowledge but experiencing his presence, knowing him intimately as a husband knows his wife and a wife knows her husband (TST, 63).

This viewpoint spans his written work. In *La Communauté du pardon et de la fête (Community and Growth)*, he was already writing: "Entering into the covenant is discovering the existence of bonds between God and myself, that I am made to be his child, to live from his light. I am called to the divine nuptials" (CG1, 46). This sentence is not kept in the second extended edition. The reference to Hosea remains, but it is situated at the beginning of the book, emphasising the reciprocal bond of belonging between the people and God (Hos 2:25 quoted in CG2, 24). This choice is furthermore in harmony with the theme of community, which becomes "my people" for J. Vanier.

However, between these two versions, the reference to God's revelation to Moses disappears: "God remembers his covenant" (Ex 2:23) in being attentive to the suffering of people. This fundamental passage from the Old Testament, revealing compassion and the decision to liberate the Hebrew people from slavery through the mediation of Moses, is simply present, without any commentary, in the first edition (CG1, 48).

We must conclude that God as a Spouse (of the person and of the people) has more weight than God as a liberator in the spirituality of J. Vanier. The reciprocal bond of belonging comes first in this notion of covenant. Furthermore, for J. Vanier, the fact of "leaving the Divine Spouse" reveals a sin (TST, 148).

This conclusion is reinforced in the reading of the two following books: *Jésus, le don de l'amour (Jesus, the Gift of Love)* (JGL, 1994) and *Entrer dans le mystère de Jésus (Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus)* (DMJ, 2005). In the first book, we find a quote from Hosea and *The Canticle of Canticles*, and a final reference to Jesus, "The Spouse" (JGL, 38-41). The second book describes the ultimate destiny of all of humanity through the metaphor of the wedding feast. Special attention

is therefore given to a quote from the text of the Book of Revelation: "The Spirit and the Spouse say 'Come!'" (Rev22:17 in DMJ, 53). From this perspective, all relationships to God, including personal and community-based relationships, are established under this nuptial model.

However, a connection exists between the two models of covenant. The Christic Covenant experienced by man (the assistant of L'Arche) with his people (the community of L'Arche) allows to move towards the nuptial covenant (and conversely). This seems to be obvious in J. Vanier's mind, who does not specify his type of covenant:

There are those who first discover the covenant with God and afterwards discover the covenant with their people. There are those who first discover the covenant with their people and afterwards discover the source of this covenant within the heart of God (CG1, 47).

The nuptial theme involves intimacy between God and humanity, an intimacy promised by the voice of the prophets in a "new Covenant". What does J. Vanier say about this?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE "NEW COVENANT"

J. Vanier does not always quote the Old Testament. He quotes very little of it, preferring the Gospels. The same passages, from Hosea, Ezekiel, Jeremiah or Isaiah and the *Canticle of Canticles* reappear. These quotations suggest a strong attachment to the promise of a renewal of humanity by the Holy Spirit, a renewal connected to God inhabiting man and vice versa. The oracle of God in Jeremiah is a testimony to this:

The days are coming – oracle of the Lord – when I will enter with the community of Israel – with the community of Judah – into a new covenant. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt. [...] I will put my instructions deep within them, write them into their being; I will become God for them, and they will become a people for me. They will no longer teach each other among companions, among brothers, repeating "learn to know the Lord!" because they will all know me, young and old – oracle of the Lord (Jer 31, 31-34).

These short verses are not quoted in the books that we were able to read; J. Vanier preferred to refer¹ to Ezekiel (36:25-27) and the promise of a “new heart”, a “new spirit”. The Bible scholar Bernard Renaud insists on the fact that this new covenant brings a new insight. It is not a simple renewal of the ancient covenant. An anthropological renewal is taking place, with an experience of interiority hitherto unknown to the people as a whole. The Bible scholar adds (seemingly without any institutional mediation): “Hence this specifically noticeable personalist nature, without cancelling the collective dimension”². These features strongly resonate with J. Vanier’s spirituality. They nourish and probably also detail his stance with respect to institutional mediations. They also help him think out a “new” anthropology by following his spiritual father, T Philippe. Since J. Vanier makes no comment upon this passage of Jeremiah, it is difficult to further expand on this reflection.

However, it should be noted that the pseudonym chosen by Jean during the clandestine period, after the closure of L’Eau Vive³, was Jeremiah. This does not seem to be a mere coincidence.

Conclusion

The covenant is truly at the heart of the life of L’Arche and remains a very rewarding approach to envisioning community relationships with people with disabilities. However, we notice certain options taken by the founder, in line with his own spirituality and deep inclinations which are never clearly defined. He disregards reflecting on the diversity of the types of covenants existing in biblical history⁴ and its characteristics.

He suggests two models of covenant, one based on human relationships and the other based on the relationship with God. In both cases, there are risks which are ignored by a lack of discernment or lucidity.

1. In YSCM, p.31 ; BNA, p. 82.

2. *Nouvelle ou éternelle Alliance? Le message des prophètes* (New or Eternal Covenant? The Prophets’ Messages), Cerf 2002, p. 331. The words in parenthesis are indeed the own words of the author, not an additional element introduced by the translator.

3. Cf. historical part, the chart of code names (correspondence NFA), chap. 6.

4. Cf. Norbert LOHFINK’s article « Alliance » (Covenant) in J-Y. LACOSTE (dir.), *Dictionnaire critique de théologie* (Critical Dictionary of Theology), Quadrige/PUF, 1998, p. 21-27.

It remains, therefore, necessary to take this study further in order to allow bonds of covenant to continue within L’Arche. The questioning of J. Vanier should result not in the abandonment of this reality, but in its development. This is all the more necessary given that J. Vanier gradually abandoned the vocabulary of covenant, to speak of “communion” instead.

CHAPTER 23.
A spirituality of communion?

Gwennola Rimbaut

Any reader of J. Vanier's books can notice the use of vocabulary focused on love, the love of Jesus (God) with respect to human beings and the love that everyone longs for in their daily relationships. This love is expressed in terms of "compassion" and "communion", but gradually one of these terms becomes ubiquitous: communion. This evolution allows us to assume that the founder is developing a spirituality of communion. Despite the extensive use of the word, it remains difficult to understand its boundaries and define its exact meaning. In a similar way, many questions arise as to its theological roots.

Inflation of the word communion in Jean Vanier's written work

Beginning with *Ton silence m'appelle* (Your Silence Is Calling Me) (YSCM, 1971), a study of the vocabulary used shows that the terms compassion, communion and love are equally used. In fact, compassion and communion, mentioned both in the introduction and the conclusion of the book, are in many cases replaced by the word love in the body of the text. Thus, love is defined as a "profound and unfailing compassion" (YSCM, 45), it is "greeting, being in communion, giving, forgiving" (YSCM, 22). The flow of these words is permanent in this book.

Progressively, the word communion stands out. A typical example of it can be found in the comparison of the two editions of *La communauté lieu du pardon et de la fête* (*Community and Growth*) (CG1, 1979 et

CG2, 1999). We have already pointed this out in the chapter dealing with L'Arche's spirituality of covenant. To confirm this trend, we need only notice that the chapter entitled "Entering into the covenant" (CG1) is also found in the second edition under the revised title: "Walking towards the covenant" (CG2, 87-105), with a different order of paragraphs and some additions. In both cases, the word communion is not mentioned. Everything is focused on community life, based on a covenant of faithfulness. However, the second edition adds a chapter on the "Mission" of the community, before returning to the question of community growth present in the previous edition. This additional chapter introduces the communion to deal with people with disabilities (the "poor"), as well as community life and life between communities:

This cry for love and communion and for recognition that rises from the hearts of the poor reveals to us the fountain of love which is in us and our capacity to give life (CG2, 100).

The spirit of community is like a fire which illuminates and gives warmth, which is communicated through the communion of hearts. [...] "Come and drink at the source which is flowing from the Eternal and which is revealed in each act of love in the community, in each moment of communion"¹ (CG2, 104).

[...] Communities must not remain isolated one from another. They are called to live in communion and in collaboration (CG2, 104).

These three quotations allow to see how the concept of "communion" is introduced and how it structures J. Vanier's thinking on several levels, by overlapping the notion of covenant.

This phenomenon grows over time. When the anthropological turn² occurs with, *Toute personne est une histoire sacrée* (Every Person Is a Sacred Story) (EPSS, 1994), it becomes increasingly clear that communion is his key concept. This word is used more than 250 times in this book, more than "ove" and "unity", which are of course widely used because of the subject matter. Communion is presented as mutual love.

1. The inverted commas are in the text, but they do not include any reference for what is quoted. We underlined the word communion.

2. We talk about an anthropological turn because J. Vanier emphasises (in the preface) that he is writing an anthropological book.

Reciprocity represents the main characteristic of this type of love. Moreover, J. Vanier no longer equates as synonyms the words love and communion here, contrary to his previous approach (cf. above in YSCM, 1971). The "communion" becomes both the human destiny of any person and a founding principle of human psychology, since it already exists within very young children (cf. EPSS, 53). He therefore suggests an unused term within the field of psychology, by transposing here spiritual and theological vocabulary. The relation between these fields is made possible through the "trust" which is always related to communion. No communion is possible without mutual trust.

It is interesting to note that in his book about Jesus, published the same year (JGL, 1994), the last pages are dedicated to this. J. Vanier shows the primacy of "communion" over action:

It is this life of love and of light, this communion of love, which the Word made flesh gave to Mary, and which is given to us, according to our call and to the extent that we put our faith in Jesus. The essential point of his message is not to lead us to do things, even if those things are for God, but to call us to live in communion with him, to remain in him. And to be in communion with Jesus is to be in communion with God, to be one with God, in trust (JGL, 196-197).

This position has the benefit of distancing itself from the risk of activism. We see this approach regarding people with disabilities. For J. Vanier, it is primarily a matter of creating a relationship, before "doing for", or better: "doing with". It should also be noted that doing is not eliminated, but has to come into existence within this communion "under the influence of the Holy Spirit" (JGL, 196). This is how actions "flow from communion and are oriented towards communion" (JGL, 198). Thus, doing allows us to fight the forces of evil which "crush life, which crush the weak and the humble" (JGL, 197). This balance is fragile, because the author's insistence is focused on communion itself. Very few lines are devoted to doing.

We therefore need to go further and look at the subtext of the term "communion".

Meaning of the word “communion”

What does J. Vanier propose as a definition for the word “communion”? Does it respect a sense of individuality?

ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE THE WORD “COMMUNION”

In *Homme et femme il les fit (Man and Woman, He Made Them)* (MW, 1984), J. Vanier moves from the covenant relationship to communion in terms of interpersonal relationships and relationship to God.

Communion is described, and defined, as a relationship of mutual trust. It is a basic human aspiration existing from birth. As reciprocity cannot be voluntary and conscious in little children, it is therefore expressed by a “love consciousness” (MW, 44), an expression that can also be found in his other books (for instance, EPSS, 53). The expression actually comes from T Philippe’s thinking (we will come back to this later).

This presence of communion in the relationship between the infant and his or her mother (and father) leads J. Vanier to say:

[...] The great sin of human beings is to no longer believe in the innocence of communion and mutual trust which opens onto the universal (MW, 46).

The expression “innocence of communion” may be frightening when it is extended to any type of communion, as it is in this case. Is mutual trust between two people a criterion of innocence? The communion so often described by Jean with his spiritual father calls for great caution! If the model of communion lies in the mother-little child relationship, it is clear that it is about the profound perception of a reassuring relationship. In addition, J. Vanier endows the baby with a capacity of love, which is much more than contentment and peace expressed by the little one.

The newborn child lives in a profound communion with its mother. The baby receives and, in its own way, gives. The baby loves and wants to express this love (MW, 45).

This extrapolation allows us to think of communion as a lost paradise to be found again. Hence, the significance of becoming like a “little child” again to rediscover communion. Later, in a covenant retreat, he contests psychologists who refuse to talk about love coming from very

young children. He insists, in opposition, on this “love of trust”, a form of love “that we have lost” (TST, 220).

In 1994, J. Vanier tries to specify what is not communion, by making the distinction between communion and very diverse words such as “generosity”, “education”, “pedagogy”, “collaboration” and “cooperation”. He then provides a more complete definition:

Communion is based on mutual trust, in which each one gives and each one receives within the deepest and most silent part of their being (EPSS, 51).

Once more, we find the notion of reciprocity and trust, but this time with the added dimension of inexpressibility and personal intimacy. The rest of the text shows once again that communion is more fundamental than action. This redundant insistence may be surprising to those aware of how incredibly active the founder was (trips, meetings, conferences, written works...), but it indicates the crux of his spirituality. As a matter of fact, he said so himself in the foreword, by expressing his loyalty to the teachings of his spiritual father.

Father Thomas considered this relationship of communion, the founding principle of any life based on relationship, as essential to understanding spiritual life and the life of faith. He helped me place communion at the heart of my anthropology (reference made at the bottom page of Father Thomas’s booklets: *Les Âges de la vie (The Ages of Life)* (EPSS, 15).

In more spiritual writings, such as the book about Jesus (JGL, 1994), communion becomes “wedding feast” or “nuptials”. J. Vanier relies on the Scriptures, especially on the Book of Revelation and the Gospel of John. He portrays Jesus as the Bridegroom, the Beloved, “to enfold each person in the embrace of love” (JGL, 201), with “the Bride, wounded by love, all her flesh crying out her thirst for the presence of the Beloved, the Spouse, in order to receive his love and to give herself to him entirely” (JGL, 202).

The language becomes mystical. What is deemed acceptable according to mystical tradition needs to be questioned in J. Vanier’s writings (cf. chap 23). At this stage, it is important to consider this personal inclination for nuptial communion, which does not in any way result from the context of the communities of L’Arche. It is true, however, that he had already accentuated this when talking about the covenant.

Finally, J. Vanier shows great coherence on a personal level, in combining his anthropological and spiritual thinking under the term of "communion", while preserving a nuptial characteristic, as he did for the covenant. It remains to be seen whether a sense of individuality is present in this form of communion.

A LACK OF INDIVIDUALITY?

Insofar as J. Vanier's thinking evolves over time, the "investigation" must reach out and look at words that have been practically synonymous. We have noted that compassion, love and communion are equivalent in his first books. However, as of 1971, in *Ton silence m'appelle* (Your Silence Is Calling Me) (YSCM), his way of defining love as compassion reveals a lack of individuality. This is illustrated by the following expression: "Compassion... a word full of meaning: to share the same pain, the same agony..." (YSCM, 46). That little word "same" is exactly the word which should not have been used. This word opens the door to confusion between the pain endured by the accompanier and that of the core member. It is even worse when it comes to agony, as this is of course about an eminently unique death, even though we are all mortal.

This book offers other questionable passages as far as the concept of individuality is concerned. Here is a comprehensive example that allows us to thoroughly understand J. Vanier's spiritual background:

There is in man a *rational and voluntary conscience* which allows him to hold his position in society and act according to the standards of society and for society, and there is a *conscience of love* which opens him up to other human beings as unique beings possessing the seeds of infinity and eternity, something ineffable, transcending society, conventions and even laws. It is this more intimate and profound conscience that does not urge us to dominate others, but inclines us to merge into the other, to identify with him, to be in communion with him and with the universe in a blaze of warmth, self-giving, self-effacement, self-sacrifice, humbleness, in a word: of love (YSCM, 91).

The tone of this passage is indeed focused on fusion, emphasised by "blaze" and the expression "merge into the other". The terms in italics (in the original text) "*rational and voluntary conscience*" / "*conscience of love*" show how this is rooted in spiritual anthropology inherited

from T Philippe, which J. Vanier spelled out in 1994 (cf. above), though not here. The issue of laws and their relativization is also added, which is a sensitive subject given the transgressions committed. These words reflect what J. Vanier really thinks. While he becomes more cautious in his writing, his thinking remains present and active, and simply emerges less regularly.

It would be exaggerated to say that this lack of individuality is permanent and clearly visible. For instance, in 1984, he writes that "communion is not a fusion" in refuting Sartre, who according to J. Vanier considered love as a "fusion where one person wins and the other loses" (MW, 46). This comment is interesting because it clearly states that J. Vanier refutes the idea of communion as fusion and considers that communion should enrich each person. He frequently asserts this regarding relationships with people with disabilities and often criticises fusional mother-child relationships. In addition, when he describes love relationships between people with disabilities, he takes into consideration emotional immaturity which drives them towards fusional desire (cf. MW, 77). And yet again, when the accompaniment is mentioned in *Accueillir notre humanité* (*Becoming Human*) (BH, 1999), "it is not a fusional relationship or a relationship of mutual dependence, but a relationship in which each person receives and gives life, and calls the other to grow towards a greater inner freedom" (BH, 173).

These writings reveal vacillation between fusional tendencies and an anti-fusional stance. Only witnesses of J. Vanier's daily life could tell us more about his practical position.

In his more religious writings, his mystical inclination, with its nuptial destiny (cf. following chapter), systematically reopens the door to a fusional aspiration which seems anchored in J. Vanier's mind and expressed in his first books. However, when considering his written work as a whole, this represents only "weak signals" that are not likely to alert many readers.

We should also point out that the word "communion" has become increasingly used within the post-Vatican II Church. This may give an impression of theological concordance. But is that really the case? Is there a link between J. Vanier's spirituality of communion and the theological evolution of the Catholic Church?

Uncertain theological rooting

Contextualisation is necessary, since J. Vanier writes at a time when post-conciliar theology valorises communion significantly. Two possibilities can be considered: the first is ecclesiological and ecumenical and starts from the Second Vatican Council; the second comes from a theology of the family under the pontificate of John Paul II (1978-2005).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "COMMUNION" IN ECCLESIOLOGY AND ECUMENISM: A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR J. VANIER?

It may appear surprising to begin with this reflection, considering the small number of references made to The Church in J. Vanier's books. However, he always had good relations with the French episcopacy, and even the unwavering support of some bishops¹. Another reason could also support the theory of such roots: his ecumenical vision and open-mindedness about the creation of Protestant or Anglican communities of L'Arche, for example in 1969 with L'Arche of Daybreak (Canada).

It just so happens that reflection on the Church and ecumenism were intense during the sessions of the Second Vatican Council and its preparation. The term "communion" came into use in the texts, especially in *Lumen Gentium* (No. 4, 8, 13-15, 18, 21, 24-25) and in *Unitatis redintegratio* (No. 2-4, 14-15, 17-19, 22), specifically through the influence of the Dominican theologian Yves Congar (1904-1995), presented as the "theologian of ecclesial communion"². These conciliar texts allow us to look at the universal Church as a communion of churches³ and to

1. Cf. especially the attitude of Mgr. Desmazières, chap. 3: "Un sacerdoce pour l'Arche?" (A vocation for L'Arche?)

2. This expression comes from Joseph FAMEREE, *Revue Théologique* de Louvain (Theological Review of Louvain), No. 28, 1997, p. 337. Cf. the well documented article from Alain NISUS, "La genèse d'une ecclésiologie de communion dans l'œuvre d'Yves Congar" (The genesis of an ecclesiology of communion in Yves Congar's work), *RSPT*, 2010/2 volume 94, p. 309-334. This article precedes his book: *L'Église comme communion et comme institution: Une lecture d'ecclésiologie du cardinal Congar à partir de la tradition des Églises de "professants"* (The Church as a Communion and an Institution: An Ecclesiological reading of Cardinal Congar Based on the Tradition of "Professant" Churches), Cerf, 2012.

3. Cf. the theological developments undergone in France by Jean-Marie R. TILLARD, *L'Église d'églises: L'ecclésiologie de communion* (The Church of churches:

envision the inclusion of Christians as a work in progress to foster the experience of unity within diversity.

Moreover, use of the term communion (*koinonia*) explored in the years following the Second Vatican Council, often replacing the term "unity", which was too tainted by a sense of uniformity. Bruno Chenu recounts this evolution in texts of ecumenical declaration and then provides a definition of it:

It was in New Delhi [1961],[...] that the term *koinonia* appeared at the heart of the definition of unity, without the interpretation in terms of community being its key concept. [...] It is from the convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982) that *koinonia* truly entered the indisputable ecumenical vocabulary¹.

Koinonia is specifically a theological and spiritual concept, and not a sociological or legal one. It focuses us on the originality of the Revelation and not on its institutional consequences. Consequently, *koinonia* is a way to build relationship with God and relationship between believers. It conveys both verticality and horizontality.

This contextual connection allows us to understand how J. Vanier was a part of this movement and inherited a way of thinking that he adapted (consciously or not) for the communities of L'Arche. The concept of communion allows him in particular to link faith in God to a commitment to the weak and needy. It enables him to envision the diversity of the communities of L'Arche as a differentiated unity, based on relationship with people with disabilities, and therefore based on a shared faith in their inalienable dignity. Unfortunately, we have no explicit evidence of this link.

The ecclesiology of communion), Cerf, 1987; Jean RIGAL, , *L'Écclésiologie de communion* (The Ecclesiology of Communion), Cerf, 1997.

1. Bruno CHENU, "L'unité sous forme de communion, l'objectif du mouvement œcuménique", *Revue de Science Religieuse (RSR)* (Unity in the Form of Communion, the Objective of the Ecumenical Movement, Review of Religious Science), 2001/2, volume 89, p. 261. The cited convergence text: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), comes from the Faith and Constitution Commission of the World Council of Churches.

COMMUNION WITHIN JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY OF THE FAMILY:
A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR J. VANIER?

During that same period, John Paul II developed an interest in the family and advocated for a theology of the family. His exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (FC), published in 1981 following the 1980 Synod of Bishops on the family, is based on his numerous catecheses on the family (1979-1984). John Paul II keenly sensed the Christian vitality of the family as a means to renew society and the Church – or at least contribute to that renewal.

In the second part of this exhortation, we notice elements that are very similar to J. Vanier's expressions and thoughts. Valorising love as a vocation for communion rooted in God himself is a shared through-line in their thinking. So is the importance of the body. For both, mind-body unity makes the body a participant in the communion of love.

God is Love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being (FC, 11).

Since man is an incarnate spirit, namely a soul that expresses itself in a body animated by an immortal spirit, he is called to love in its unified totality. Love embraces the whole human body, and the body is a participant in spiritual love (FC, 11).

The paragraphs quoted above are immediately followed by sentences about virginity, which is the other form of “actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being created in the image of God” (FC, 11). Virginity, which is not to be confused with celibacy¹, is not addressed at all by J. Vanier, who mostly values celibacy. It is possible to interpret this silence as an implicit avoidance of the question of virginity, but it would be unwise to extrapolate. It is more pertinent to focus on the obvious proximity between J. Vanier and John Paul II's theology of the family.

1. The question of celibacy is regularly addressed in J. Vanier's books, for example in *Homme et femme il les fit* (*Man and woman, he made them*), p. 125-133. There is a real plea for a rehabilitation of celibacy but by keeping the possibility of a privileged love between two people attracted to one another. It is therefore a mutual love oriented towards God and fragile people.

This point is confirmed by reading another of his books, *Homme et femme il les fit: pour une vie d'amour authentique*¹ (*Man and Woman, He Made Them: For a Life of Authentic Love*). In this book, we find several footnotes referring explicitly to texts of the Catholic Church and of John Paul II himself².

It should also be noted that J. Vanier's parents founded The Vanier Institute of the Family as early as 1965 in Ottawa (Canada). The question then arises as to whether this institute promoted John Paul II's theology of the family and if it influenced J. Vanier. The elements currently provided by the website³ indicate ecumenical openness and the will to found a secular institution that takes the real situation of Canadian families into consideration. These elements are specified as founding principles of its creation (1965). The research conducted is multidisciplinary (excepting theology). There therefore seems to be no connection with John Paul II's thinking. Moreover, the foundation was created at the time of the “Quiet Revolution”⁴, which was not favourable to the development of ecclesial bonds.

ROOTING IN THOMAS PHILIPPE'S THEOLOGY

In 1994, as we said earlier, J. Vanier clearly states that he was following T Philippe's thinking and refers to the booklets *Les Âges de la vie* (*The Ages of Life*). This is the most explicit element we have. Therefore,

1. Co-published by Fleurus/Bellarmin, 1984 and 1989 (the two editions are identical). This book published a decade before the publication we are studying is not categorized by J. Vanier as a book about anthropology, but as a testimony which is the result of twenty years of life together with people with disabilities (cf. his preface). Nevertheless, he is already clearly engaged in this anthropological evolution and does not show any mystic rooting anymore. It remains a book about Christian spirituality due to its numerous references to faith in Jesus Christ and the significance of prayers and sacraments.

2. Thus, John Paul II is quoted three times: his General Audience of February 20th, 1980 (p.61); “The role of the Christian Family in the world today”, being *Familiaris Consortio*, No. 19 (p. 138) ; the apostolic letter *On the Christian meaning of human suffering* February 11th, 1984.

3. <https://vanierinstitute.ca/fr/>

4. This historical event, well known in Quebec, represents a significant period of time in the history of this region, a period of reforms but also of spectacular decline of the Catholic Church. In twenty years (1960-1980) the number of priests and nuns was divided by half and Parish churches were emptied of worshippers.

the first question is to evaluate whether this term of “communion” is significantly expounded upon within Thomas Philippe’s writings. We need to wait for the Dominican Friars assigned to this matter to complete their analysis on this point. For now, we can simply quote Xavier Le Pichon, who confirms the significance of this aspect which was apparently intensified by T Philippe’s meeting with Dr Thompson:

Father Thomas very often evoked this man [Dr Thompson] about whom he wrote in 1977: “From the beginning, ..., Doctor Thompson, being converted, was seeking the religion of communion and love within the Church of Jesus. He came to see me, not to do psychology with me, but to ask me what theology and saints taught about the life of grace which went beyond psychology. During our first conversation, he told me: ‘the most intimate and the best of human beings escape psychological analysis. What do saints and theologians say about this secret of the heart?’ I told him about the fruits of the Holy Spirit according to Paul, and he immediately answered me: ‘That’s what I’m looking for!’¹.”

“Father Thomas began to write a lot. He became more than just a scholar of St Thomas. He was someone who wrote extensively. He renewed his theology. He began to have this new vision of raw material, of the body, as if he had freed himself from being the disciple of St Thomas and was becoming a sort of creator-theologian.” And from that time on, as J. Vanier pointed out to me in 1994, ‘the words that constantly kept coming up again within the writings of Father Thomas were communion and gift’².”

This long excerpt interestingly emphasizes the significance of “communion” in T Philippe’s thinking, who is the theologian” and initiator of a new (deviant) theology that will nourish J. Vanier’s thinking. Only extensive research on the content of the word “communion” in T Philippe’s work could allow us to go further. But the conclusion is obvious: that is exactly where we need to look next!

1. Xavier Le Pichon’s report on the position of Fr Thomas Philippe in the founding of L’Arche, May 10th, 2016, p. 13. Quotation of a letter written to Mgr Desmazières in March 1977 (report available on the internet <https://mariedominiquephilippe.com/files.wordpress.com/2019/11/>)

2. *Ibid.*, p. 15. Here, Xavier Le Pichon quotes an interview of J. Vanier conducted by himself in 1994.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that “communion” is a key concept in both J. Vanier’s and T Philippe’s approaches, though we cannot conclude that the definition and use of the word is identical in both cases.

We note that J. Vanier does not look to St Paul to justify his numerous uses of “communion”, even though this word is used thirteen times in the Epistles¹, yet absent from the Gospels. This fact emphasizes the idea that he is relying essentially on his spiritual father’s thinking.

His focus on this word progressively eliminated the word “covenant”, as well as the word “compassion”, which were very common in his early books. It is possible that insisting on the love-communion reciprocity dispelled words denoting asymmetry² in relationships.

J. Vanier’s attempts to find a definition reinforce the conviction that this communion resides primarily on the spiritual plane, with a fusional tendency constantly rising to the surface, despite his own warnings to avoid the fusional.

The primacy of this type of communion over action clearly takes us away from the very meaning of communion – “sharing the load” – if we consider the Latin etymology. The meaning of the ancient Greek *koinonia* (a word used in the New Testament) would be closer to J. Vanier’s views, as it concerns many aspects of life:

“In classical Greek, words derived from *koinos* were generally used to designate matters concerning various groups of citizens’ associations (e.g., state, family, sexual encounter, trade association, union with the gods)³”.

1. Cf. Julienne CÔTE, *Cent mots-clés de la théologie de Paul* (A Hundred Key Words from Paul’s Theology), Novalis/Cerf, 2000, p.91-95. Main uses in Rom 12:13 ; 15:26-27 ; 1 Cor 1:9 ; 10:16.18.20 ; 2 Cor 1:7 ; 6:14 ; 8:4.23 ; 9:13 ; 13:13 ; Gal 6:6 ; Phil 1:5 ; 2:1 ; 3:0 ; 4:15 ; Phm 6:17. J. Vanier quotes little from St Paul in his books and none of these references.

2. Compassion in J. Vanier’s thinking lacks articulation with the doing. It focuses on the emotion felt by the individual from witnessing the suffering of others. This point of view strongly contrasts with the way contemporary theology takes on this concept. He visibly inherited from a conception of compassion in the “strict sense”: “love properly affective, sympathy, pain felt for the suffering of Jesus’ (in G. JACQUEMET (dir.), *Catholicisme* (Catholicism), Paris, Letouzey et Anné, 1949, Volume II, col. 1417).

3. Jean-Yves LACOSTE (dir.), *op. cit.*, p. 287.

This etymological digression does not exist in J. Vanier's writing, which mainly reflects his understanding of Christian design as a final communion of human beings with God. This point of view would be shared by all Christians if J. Vanier did not constantly slip into his personal ecstatic communion with God, a communion which becomes a source of action. This viewpoint is problematic and may have had consequences on the way J. Vanier "guided" people and assistants¹. Indeed, if the search for communion becomes primary in interpersonal relationships with God, it is no longer received as a gift at the heart of brotherly deeds, which must remain primary. Just like prayer is an action that does not culminate in seeking the feeling of communion (sometimes received as a gift) but in recognising our filiation to God.

Finally, the similarity with the evolving theological vocabulary of the Catholic Church after Vatican II remains superficial, in our opinion. It does, however, have an effect: it helps J. Vanier's spiritual discourse to be favourably received within Christian communities. It may have also numbed the vigilance of bishops, priests, clergymen and nuns, both religious and secular, more or less trained in theology. Could they have been alerted by J. Vanier's deeply buried Carmelite mysticism, which we now need to address?

CHAPTER 24. A "Carmelite" mystic?

Gwennola Rimbaut

There is no need to have heard the revelations about T Philippe's perverted mystic spirituality to identify the mystical tone prevalent in J. Vanier's books. The tone is intentionally Carmelite, given the regular references to St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila and the occasional reference to St Therese of Lisieux. The usual scriptural references of these mystics are also present, especially the Cantic of Canticles and the Gospel of St John. Quotation marks have been used in the title of this chapter to immediately suggest the specific use and interpretation of this mystical tradition by J. Vanier, for faithfulness to the true Carmelite spirit seems to be lacking. Once more, J. Vanier does not clearly make his mysticism explicit; he addresses the topic bit by bit. Once again, the scattered clues have to be put together, as objectively as possible, by quoting his writings. We will build our attempt at interpretation by merging J. Vanier's expressions with Carmelite writings and scholars' annotations. It seems to us that in the end, mysticism reinforces J. Vanier's desire for fusional communion with God – and with people within the scope of shared faith.

This finding partially contradicts the previous chapter, where we mentioned his refusal of fusional love in general, and more specifically within the mother-child relationship. As far as rationality is concerned, the relevance still holds, but J. Vanier's deeply held mysticism facilitates his breaks from rationality and his lack of attention to individuality.

1. Cf. sociological part which analyses this accompaniment bond, chap. 12.

First hints at a mystical union of spouses

The first hints can be found chronologically in *Ton silence m'appelle* (Your Silence Is Calling Me) (YSCM, 1971), where J. Vanier makes little or no effort to hide his fusional and mystical spiritual tendencies. He has not yet reached the public notoriety he will gain later on, and this book has probably not been reviewed by many people before its publication. It is normal to find unwise expressions, but they are indicative of his inner personality. The following quotation establishes a connection between human love and divine love through an exhilarating and fusional mode, including a final note about prophets and mystics.

The union of love of spouses, of these new spouses, is a true fusion of love which even unites them to God. It is a flow of divine life passing from one spouse to the other, one spouse revealed to the other like a vision of the infinite, one spouse discovering in the other something like a manifestation of God, the eternal presence so longed for by men in all times and especially by men today in our spatial and nuclear era. What some people seek in the elation of art and creativity, or in the often illusory hopes of science or in the adventurous elation of drugs and sexuality, spouses find, driven by the Spirit of God, in the love that unites them, a love as romantic and poetic as the great love stories of humanity, as realistic, total, and sacrificial as that of prophets and mystics (YSCM, 25-26).

Another expression emphasises the link with the mystical. The union of spouses (including sexuality) becomes a form of mystical union between the couple and God: "The union of the two spouses may also intensify to such a degree that they enter specially in God's life in a mystic way" (YSCM, 25). Therefore, we need to understand that the intensification of the union leads to this fusion which would be at the same time an introduction to the life of God himself. Here, a problematic shift occurs, since God, the Trinity, is the communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – three distinct beings –, which is very far from any fusional model. Only by maintaining space between people can love flow between them.

However, in another excerpt of this book, J. Vanier is more respectful of the integrity of each person, while maintaining the idea of fusion¹ :

1. It should be noted that the idea of fusion is exceptionally present in the *Spiritual Canticle* of St John of the Cross, in which he mentions the spiritual marriage, the union, and the transformation of love in God, cf. B stanza, § 4.

"Our freedoms – each being entirely himself/herself – both blend in a unique kiss from which love springs" (YSCM, 66). This sentence uses a word typical of mysticism: the kiss. Since this word will recur in the different writings of J. Vanier, a clarification is required.

THE MYSTIC KISS

According to St Bernard¹, the kiss represents the effusion of the Holy Spirit, but for St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila, the kiss seals the union of spiritual marriage. Both approaches complement each other, since spiritual marriage is essentially the action of the Holy Spirit when the soul is passive in this ultimate stage. A passage from the *Spiritual Canticle* of St John of the Cross demonstrates this:

From this point, it emerges that the bride of Canticles, longing for this happy state [of spiritual marriage] said: "Who shall give to me, my brother, you sucking the breasts of my mother, finding you out, and kissing you, so that no one may despise me" (Cant. 8,1)? The name of brother given to the Spouse conveys the equality between them that the betrothal has created between the two lovers just before the marriage. These words "you, sucking the breasts of my mother", mean: you, drying up and turning off in me appetites and passions, which are just like the milk reservoirs of Eve, our mother according to the flesh, and which are hindering spiritual marriage with God. This work, once being performed, I long for, she said, to find you out, that is far from creatures and myself, in the loneliness and nudity of spirit which are reached by the extinction of desires, and in kissing you there, privately. In other words: that my nature, now being alone and cleansed from all impurity, either from the body or the spirit, be united to you alone, to your nature without any intermediary. Now this only belongs to the spiritual marriage which represents this kiss of the soul to God, after which no one has the courage to despise it. Indeed, at this point, the soul is no longer molested, either by the devil, or the flesh, or the world, or its own desires².

St John of the Cross develops both the metaphor of the kiss and breastfeeding in very clear focus: to show the difference between the

1. Cf. Sermon VIII of St Bernard of Clairvaux in *Œuvres mystiques de saint Bernard* (The Mystical Works of Saint Bernard), Seuil, 1953, p. 132-140.

2. John of the Cross, *Le Canticque spirituel* (Spiritual Canticle), Cerf, 1980, Stanza B 22 [A 27] (No. 8), p. 152. The translation is made in the *Œuvres complètes* (Complete Works), DDB, 2016, p. 793.

human and the divine, and therefore the necessity of this long path where “all desires are quenched”¹ to truly encounter God in a form of “nudity and solitude”. Using the reality of human love as a starting point to evoke the mystic union between God and human beings does not, however, allow us to identify them. Use of the metaphor is what allows us to indicate a perspective which goes beyond human marriage and can only be suggested through metaphor. J. Vanier really seems to take this further, making human marriage a possible entry into the mystic union with God. However, a problem remains. It lies in the fact that the mystic union is personal, and the couple is not a person. Its unity does not abolish the singularity of the two spouses, who both have their own very distinct relationship with God.

The example of Camille C.², a mystic who is a married woman, illustrates this distinction. When Henri Caffarel asks her how the two loves of her life coexist in her (towards God and her husband), she explains the difference: her husband is not a man of prayer, although he is a dedicated Christian; they do not exchange views on this topic even though her husband certainly feels something about the mystic life of his wife. Married life remains enriching, including on a carnal level, but “spiritual life [...] uplifts us little by little above the social conditioning of our sex”³. Camille’s mystic union is a personal bond between her and God, a bond which urges her to love generously her relatives and which does not transform her marital union into a mystic union!

Finally, it is difficult to know on which level J. Vanier situates the fusion-union of spouses: union of bodies? union of hearts? union of intelligence? He mostly evokes the necessary conditions for the existence of this union-fusion: a maturity qualified as “rare” and an availability to the Holy Spirit “who holds the science of the heart” (YSCM, 25). It would be

1. This extinction is the fruit of the active night of senses described in *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. This path of purification is the first step of beginners before entering in a passive night leading to the union. John of the Cross says explicitly that there is from the start the necessity of a “purgation of all sensitive appetites for the external things of the world, the delights of the flesh, and the gratifications of the will” (*Œuvres complètes* (Complete Works), *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book One, Chapter One, n°4, p. 188).

2. Henri CAFFAREL, *Camille C. ou l'emprise de Dieu* (Camille C. or God's Hold on a Person), Troussures, ed. “Feu Nouveau”, 1982.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

necessary to explore the Holy Spirit’s role according to J. Vanier. Paradoxically, this one extends God’s call to everyone with his “requirements of a mystic union of freedom in the Spirit” (YSCM, 125). This expression is quite obscure as it is torn between “requirement” and “freedom within the Spirit” – whereas the mystic union is not a requirement, but a gift of God. The freedom offered by the Spirit always emerges from faithfulness to Jesus Christ’s message. J. Vanier’s viewpoint therefore emerges from a universal openness to all types of religions.

Other clues are to be looked for in subsequent books.

BNA, 1978

In *Ne crains pas (Be Not Afraid)* (BNA, 1978), J. Vanier makes a real plea for life in a community of love with wounded people. The book begins by describing the way Jesus loves, and then expands upon the call to love one’s neighbour. The final part is guided by the prospect of being “invited to the wedding feast”, which is the title of the last chapter (BNA, 95). It is therefore in the final part of the book that the insistence on Jesus as a spouse, the beloved Jesus, can be found. Scriptural quotations come from the Gospel of John and the *Spiritual Canticle*. The tone of the spiritual discourse becomes more and more mystical. The focus is on the divinization of human beings, a traditional theme in spiritual theology.

God calls us, in some ways, to be his equals, to be so united in Jesus that we become like God himself, participating in his divine nature. This is the new covenant (BNA, 99).

This is essentially the experience of prayer. When Jesus says: “I give you my peace, I leave you my peace”, he is giving us the treasure of God which is the kiss of God. It is the resting of the beloved in the beloved. This experience of union with God touches us in our very depths and is already the calling forth to the infinite (BNA, 99).

These two quotations are both accurate and wrong. The participation of human beings in divine life is part of the Revelation in Christians but the expressions “like God himself” and “his equals” resonate as a lack of individuality in the relationship with God. God remains Wholly Other... It is useless to return to the word “kiss”, already explained above, but we notice its highly characteristic presence in mystic language. The following pages

feature excerpts from the prophets Isaiah, then a reference to the *Canticle of Canticles* and the names of J. Vanier's favourite mystics, namely St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila (BNA, 101).

THE SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE: A FUSION?

J. Vanier makes an implicit link with the thinking of St John of the Cross. For this mystic master, the spiritual marriage leads to the two natures (of God and the soul) being "mingled in a same spirit and same love"¹. We can therefore talk about a form of fusion whose features do not involve a lack of individuality. This spiritual union remains an advance "participation" in the glory of God. The metaphors used by St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila show us how to understand this type of union in God. St John of the Cross uses the image of the torch whose light is no longer discernible in the vast radiance of the sun (God)². St Teresa of Avila suggests imagining two candles whose flames become one when they join each other, or a stream that flows into the sea, becoming indistinguishable from it³.

For these two mystic masters, the person does not disappear in God but becomes aware of divine communications and his own smallness in the greatness of God. The person fully exists in a union in which God remains the initiator of all offered grace and where individuality permanently remains. Moreover, the prospect of the spiritual marriage opens onto participation in a life of God's love for all and his will of salvation for his whole creation.

An erudite scholar of St John of the Cross, Jean Baruzi⁴, demonstrates the existence of a theophanic state after "the night of the spirit". This state remains extremely rare, very few mystics experience it. In contrast, this

1. *Spiritual Canticle*, B (22, 3), p. 149.

2. *Spiritual Canticle*, B (22, 4), p. 150.

3. *The Interior Castle*, "The 7th Mansion", chap. 2, § 4, p. 1142.

4. Jean BARUZI, *Jean de la Croix et le problème de l'expérience mystique* (John of the Cross and the Problem of the Mystical Experience), Salvator, [1924, 1931] 1999. This author was heavily criticised at the time of his thesis for overemphasizing mysticism as a form of metaphysical intelligence instead of mysticism as a purely free gift. He is recognized, however, for his extensive knowledge of the writings of John of the Cross. (Cf. Bernard MINVIELLE, *Qui est mystique? Un demi-siècle de débats (1890-1940)* (Who is a Mystic? A Half-Century of Debates, 1890-1940), CLD, 2017, p. 48-54).

author insists on the flaw of beginners: they remain very attached to sensitive prayer, to a certain spiritual and even sensual greed, and to serious imperfections, sometimes including lies that "forbid the life of the soul"¹. The theophanic union does not happen on the level of the senses; it occurs only after going through true purification, of the sensual as well (including sexuality and other forms of sensuality²).

All these elements hardly seem compatible with the presentation of the union with God made by J. Vanier, or with what today seems like his penchant for a very sensual kind of communion. Moreover, Teresa of Avila warns her readers that the comparison between the sacrament of marriage and spiritual marriage is a "rough comparison":

The difference is certainly huge. In the covenant which I am talking about, everything is spiritual and that which is corporeal is far removed from it; the consolations and spiritual aspirations that our Lord gives us are thousands of miles away from the kind of satisfactions two spouses must enjoy³.

It seems that J. Vanier does not really take into consideration these differences between marital love among humans and spousal love between a person and God. Nevertheless, we do not have additional material from his books to demonstrate that point more thoroughly.

The place of mysticism through the years

It is not our goal here to do an exhaustive review of the entire written work of J. Vanier; the point is to conduct a simple survey of a few books to determine how persistent over time this mystical background was and if there were any variations.

1979 (CG1): MYSTICISM IN THE INTIMACY OF PRAYER

In *La communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête* (*Community and Growth*) (first edition) we note that the last paragraph before the final conclusion is entitled "Invited to the Wedding Feast"; however, the tone

1. *Ibid.*, p. 617.

2. *Ibid.*, cf. p. 619-621.

3. Teresa of Avila, *Œuvres complètes, Le Château intérieur*, 5^{ème} demeure (Complete Works, The Interior Castle, The 5th Mansion), chapter 4, §3, p. 1055.

is nothing like the previous books. In this case, he is simply insisting on the joy of celebrations in the community. The whole book is focused on community life and the real-life experience of communities. Faith in God is presented throughout, in a balanced manner, as grounded in real commitment towards the most vulnerable. The only symptomatic passage can be found in his evocation of prayer. We are again confronted with a mystic tone and the evocation of the “kiss”: “The secret of our being lies in this kiss with God” (CG1, 156). A brief reference which nonetheless echoes J. Vanier’s intimacy, since he loves to talk about the “secret” of his life as if it were anybody’s secret. We could interpret his “secret” as a part of his mystical life that corresponds to a memorized mystical spiritual experience. We don’t know much more than that, but the possibility is credible. Overall, this book remains above any suspicion of mystic deviation. J. Vanier even demonstrates cognitive distance from the feelings experienced in prayer by referring to Ruth Burrows¹, another author.

1989 (TBB): THE MYSTICISM OF NAZARETH

Le Corps brisé (The Broken Body) is a book aimed at young people, according to the preface by Cardinal Danneels (TBB, 13). This may be the reason that drove J. Vanier to minimise references to biblical texts. The words of Jesus are only rarely evoked and not referenced, whereas God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are frequently mentioned. The approach remains fundamentally Christian, with a desire to make the reader join in “God’s plan” (TBB, 31), to become part of a narrative driven by a purpose of communion and unity in this “broken world”.

The mystical dimension is provided here with a variant, since the vocabulary refers, sometimes clearly, to St Thérèse of Lisieux: “the little path of love” (TBB, 132); “the little flower of communion” (TBB, 97). The emphasis is also laid on the spirituality of Nazareth (TBB, 146), the hidden life of Jesus. We are also confronted again with the evocation of the kiss, the eternal wedding feast and the secret names of Jesus: the Spouse, the Beloved...

One passage draws attention to the mystic experience in itself, as if J. Vanier was himself bearing witness.

1. Ruth BURROWS, *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer*, London, Sheed and Ward, 1976. The reference is quoted in the 3rd note, p. 156.

We discover that this Beloved touches us in the depths of our loneliness, as no human being could touch us. He calls us to this fire, to this thirst for love, to this peace that surpasses any other peace. There are no words to describe the gentleness and the strength of this experience: the Heart of Jesus in my heart, a peaceful ecstasy (TBB, 133).

These sentences reflect an ecstatic, inexpressible mystic experience. At the same time, J. Vanier seems to be proposing this path to the largest possible audience, even though – as we have previously demonstrated – this experience is too focused on ecstasy and pleasures of the senses to be authentic mysticism.

[1994 (EPSS AND JGL)], 1999 (BH): A MYSTICAL PATH, INCREASINGLY PSYCHOLOGICAL

These two books (EPSS et JGL) were often cited in the previous chapter regarding the word “communion” and its mystic dimension. Therefore, to avoid repetition, let’s move on to the next book: *Accueillir notre humanité (Becoming Human)* (1999). The word “mystical”, immediately used in the book’s introduction, is expounded upon later, in Chapter 4: “The Path to Freedom”.

At the beginning of the book, mysticism is associated with anguish, “a force that urges mystics to a deeper intimacy with God” (BH, 13). The theme of anguish is ubiquitous in J. Vanier’s work, but here it becomes the driving force of spiritual growth towards a deeper union with God. It is hard to know if J. Vanier is talking about psychological anguish or about the mystic state related to the night of senses or the spirit. These nights cause quite similar psychological phenomena¹. During these mystical states of mind, anguish becomes an effect, one of the painful consequences, and not a driving force. Only love and the desire of God help mystic life. J. Vanier makes assertions, yet always leaves his readers in ignorance as to what he means precisely by this word “anguish” (as well as many other words).

1. Cf. Père Marie-Eugène de l’Enfant-Jésus, *Je veux voir Dieu* (Father Marie-Eugène de l’Enfant-Jésus, I want to see God), ed. Du Carmel, 1963, p. 772-775 (« Ébranlements ordinaires produits par l’action de Dieu dans la nuit de l’Esprit », point 1 : Phénomènes psychologiques) (“Ordinary disruptions caused by God’s actions in the night of the Spirit”, point 1 : Psychological Phenomena). These conclusions may be also found in Jean Baruzi’s writings. (*op. cit.*).

In addressing the topic of freedom, J. Vanier introduces the notion of “false-self” in reference to Donald Nicholl, an English theologian (1923-1997). Nicholl offers his interpretation of a verse from the *Canticle of Canticles* (Cant. 5:2), more precisely, the beginning of the verse: “I was sleeping but I wake up: I hear my darling knocking!”¹ (translation of the TOB French version). Exegesis emphasises that the opposition between sleeping and waking up is at the heart of this verse, because the action is God knocking. J. Vanier refers to this interpretation of Nicholl's:

“I am sleeping (or the ego is asleep) but my heart is awake” (Cant. 5:2,) and explains that “to allow the heart to satisfy its deepest aspirations, the ego, this part of the self always watching itself and putting on an act, must disappear” (BH, 161-162).

J. Vanier's method is substandard here, since we do not have the precise reference to Donald Nicholl's work, even though the text is cited in quotation marks. We are left with a truncated verse of the *Canticle of Canticles*, whose translation is not questioned. Moreover, he gets ahead of himself by stating that all “spiritual masters” (BH, 162) talk about it, as if there were a consensus on such an interpretation! With these loose supporting arguments, J. Vanier takes the liberty of transposing this idea to the Gospel of St John:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, except if the grain of wheat falls in the ground and dies, it remains alone; if it dies, it bears much fruit. Anyone who loves his life loses it; and anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life” (John 12:24-25). Life here means the false self (or the ego), and “eternal life” is not life after death, but the life we are called upon to live starting today in the freedom of love (BH, 162).

In the same manner as Nicholl (though this needs further verification), he recklessly mixes the spiritual level with psychoanalytical theory, which is where the concepts of true and false self² come from. The mystical level will remain very present in this book, because he develops his

1. Translation of the *Bible œcuménique* (Ecumenical Bible), Cerf, 1984.

2. Cf. Donald WINNICOTT, “Distorsion du moi en fonction du vrai et faux self”, in *Processus de maturation chez l'enfant* (Ego distortion in terms of true and false self, in *Maturational Process in the Child*), Payot et Rivages, 1989.

own conception of the seven stages of spiritual life, resulting in “the communion with the source of the universe, God” (BH, 176). These stages, which are mainly psychological, were introduced in our first chapter to show the position of J. Vanier as a guide and spiritual master.

2012 (TST): THE MYSTICISM OF ENCOUNTERING THE POOR

In *Les Signes des temps* (*The Signs of the Times*), we could well have missed the only mention of the word “mystical” (TST, 138), due to the fact that we no longer have this vocabulary, or any reference to St John of the Cross. Yet what remains is essential to J. Vanier's thinking, in its best form.

Without the real and deep transformation of our hearts, faith does not change anything in life, it does not generate a new vision or a new world. This transformation through encountering poor and vulnerable people is at once mystic, social and profoundly human. We need to envision a new wisdom and new ways of life from this experience (TST, 138).

The mystical dimension refers to the presence of Jesus in this encounter with the poor. It is interesting to see that it is not totalizing and that there is a social, and simply human, dimension to experience this encounter.

In fact, the pages related to encountering the other are focused on a communion named “beatitude” here (TST, 76). The way he talks about St Paul's encounter with Jesus – “He fell, he became blind, he was transformed” (TST, 76) - refers to a dazzling mystical experience, generative of the encounter with the little ones for J. Vanier. He hopes that the assistants of L'Arche, and people at large, can have such an experience.

Towards what conclusion?

A PERSISTENT MYSTICISM WITH VARIABLE TONALITIES

By gathering these clues, it seems easy to perceive the considerable significance of mystical life for J. Vanier, and that he has a real and indelible experience of it, albeit partial. This constitutes his intimate “secret”. We do not presume to have discovered it, but we notice it in

his frequent expressions, his sensitive and ecstatic tones. Those raise questions and reveal a detachment from the Carmelite tradition, which attaches so much significance to the purification of the senses. Nevertheless, J. Vanier seems to be convinced of experiencing states of mystical union that are “nuptials”, “wedding feasts” and “spiritual marriage” with God. In this respect, J. Vanier remains consistent and does not refer to any other mystical model of the Christian tradition: his only reference is indeed Carmelite, essentially St John of Cross.

This acquisition seems coherent given its double filiation.

A DOUBLE MYSTICAL FILIATION

There is a certain spirituality inherited from his father, Georges Vanier. In the biography that Jean dedicated to him, the mystical and Carmelite dimension are obvious.

The Christian mystical tradition, some of whose greatest interpreters are St Bernard, St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, saw in the book of the Bible “The Canticle of Canticles” the authentic depiction of love that unites souls to God. This is why those who fully dedicated themselves to Jesus in their desire to follow Him, Him alone, have always been known as spouses of Christ. This helps us to understand the meaning of excerpts such as the following one, which was taken from a letter that my father wrote to a Carmelite Sister on the January 24th, 1961: “I must admit that your letter deeply moved me, even to tears... You see, I have such a love for Jesus’ spouses that I cannot come near them, even in thought, without feeling an ineffable grace. And when the heart is involved – the heart of Jesus, your heart and my heart, together – It is a blessing that to me is almost a sign of divine predilection¹.”

J. Vanier continues with this quotation by describing his father’s love for the “Aunt Virgin Mary”. These points of junction with his own spirituality are not to be overvalued, since Jean did not have a family life for long. However, this filiation is acceptable and very honourable, whereas the influence of T Philippe is problematic due to his condemnation by Rome.

The other Carmelite legacy comes from his spiritual father, T Philippe, and we need to look into what his teachings were about St John of the Cross. It is quite likely we will find erroneous interpretations that could shed light on some of J. Vanier’s ideas.

A NEW UNIVERSALIST MYSTICISM

As time goes by, J. Vanier breaks new ground. He tries to offer a mystical approach that is very universal, with a much greater basis in psychological development, independent from religions, rites or other various beliefs. He keeps a focal point, the mysticism of encountering the poor, which reveals us to ourselves and opens our mind to the encounter with God. The objective remains identical: communion with God and humanity. This mysticism becomes a new “wisdom” for the transformation of the world.

This shift from Carmelite mysticism to a universal mysticism can only come as a surprise. Why should he want to keep a mystical side at all costs? The encounter with “the poor” does not need to be mystical, it just needs to be experienced deeply and in truth.

In the absence of solid arguments and grounds, J. Vanier’s discourse proves to be elusive, disjointed and not very credible at a rational level. To this point, J. Vanier would tell us that mysticism goes beyond reason, which is true – but it does not eliminate it!

1. J. Vanier, *Ma faiblesse c’est ma force: un aperçu de la vie intérieure du Général Georges Vanier, gouverneur général du Canada de 1960 à 1967* (In weakness strength: overview of the inner life of General Georges Vanier, Governor General of Canada from 1960 to 1967), Bellarmin, 1980 (1st ed. 1970), p. 47-48.

CHAPTER 25.
A persistent filiation with Thomas Philippe

Gwennola Rimbaut

One of the issues that concern L'Arche is to know to what extent J. Vanier subscribed to the “mystical-erotic” thinking of T Philippe and refused to question his sexually predatory behaviour. The socio-historical, psychological and psychiatric investigations provide the most significant information on this matter. Yet J. Vanier's books also provide elements, some very easily identifiable such as recurring references to T Philippe, others more ambiguous and subject to various interpretations. Certain passages can be read on two different levels: the text from the general public's point of view, and the subtext as understood by “initiated” readers, namely, the proponents of T Philippe's theories and practices.

A persistent reference: Thomas Philippe

In almost all his prefaces, J. Vanier expresses a word of gratitude to his “spiritual father” T Philippe, with whom he said he founded L'Arche. These mentions are very similar from one book to another. There are, however, two exceptions:

- One preface does not include this acknowledgement. J. Vanier presents himself as the sole founder of L'Arche (BH, 2009). Towards the end of the book, he praises the quality of T Philippe's accompaniment,

stating that he was the one who revealed the “secret” of his mission to him¹ (BH, 138-139).

- One book (EPSS, 1994) in which the autobiographical side is more developed, including several references to T Philippe. This phenomenon is worth being studied.

ELEMENTS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN *TOUTE PERSONNE EST UNE HISTOIRE SACRÉE* (EVERY PERSON IS A SACRED STORY) (EPSS, 1994)

The autobiographical narrative is fragmented and appears in different chapters. Some elements are new compared to what he had written elsewhere. Analysing them sheds new light on the way J. Vanier perceives T Philippe's role in his own life. We divided the significant elements into themes:

T Philippe's invitation: J. Vanier said he was “invited” by T Philippe to come see him in Trosly, in 1963, to get to know his new friends, people with mental disabilities (EPSS, 7). The type of relationship formed with T Philippe is specified at the end of the book. J. Vanier reveals a founding experience: “I had the impression that he knew, that he could guess all the good and the bad in me – my secret –, that he loved me and accepted me the way I was. It was liberating for me. It is wonderful to be seen, to be recognized as a person who has a destiny and a mission” (EPSS, 238).

The encounter with people with disabilities: it was decisive. J. Vanier repeats it in all his books, naming Raphaël and Philippe. He says he discovered and was personally moved by these people waiting for love and friendship (it was also the time when he discovered “walls”, their living conditions, their rejection by society EPSS, 7. 19-22).

The evolution of J. Vanier's life: three very different periods are revealed (EPSS, 49). After his childhood: his eight years working in the navy (from 13 to 21 years old); his intellectual years of studies and a little bit of teaching philosophy; the discovery of fragile people and life with them. Looking back on his life stages allows J. Vanier to say he moved from a world of competitiveness and efficiency to a world of suffering

1. Cf. T Philippe's letter to J. Vanier in which he tells him that he has been chosen by the Virgin Mary to carry out a spiritual work (APJV E2/F8/07).

and discovery of the *communion* (in italics in the text: EPSS, 49). J. Vanier evokes Raphaël and Philippe to express their desire to live with a friend, not with a navy officer or a professor! He emphasises the fundamental discovery he made thanks to them: “I discovered the human being's thirst for communion” (EPSS, 50).

The evocation of his childhood: this is very brief. “My childhood memories are good memories³ (EPSS, 199) and “we were reassured by our parents; I do not recall any conflicts between them”. He mentions his father's words at the time he decided to train to be a seaman and leave his family, when he was 13. “I trust you, if that's what you want, you've got to do it” (EPSS, 114).

Ideal and human relationships: J. Vanier admits he had “a great love of success and recognition from senior officers” during his life in the navy (EPSS, 83). Ideals were more important than human relationships. He acknowledges that this perspective lasted throughout his studies. Even the study of theology was a way of achieving his Christian ideal, which at the time was not “a life of communion”. Much later in this book (EPSS, 200), he describes a sort of austere and lonely life during these years studying theology and philosophy, close to T Philippe. This period is described as a “discovery of the world of spiritual life”, a “life of prayers” and “intellectual life” (EPSS, 200). The relational dimension comes later on, he says, thanks to people with disabilities. This is also when he discovered “relational wounds inside me, all my fears about others. [...] learning, yes, but being in communion with others, being vulnerable towards them, was much more difficult for me. I was running away from people for ideals!” (EPSS, 83-84).

J. Vanier and his leadership at L'Arche : he recognizes his own real leadership skills as “strong and efficient” (EPSS, 94). There is no doubt about that, but he admits this may have been overwhelming and hurtful for some collaborators. Later in the same book (EPSS, 138-139), he describes his experience of authority as a process of evolution for him. In the beginning, he exercised authority the same way he did in the navy: “I knew, others didn't know. I was the leader: the others had to do what I asked them to do. It was simple”. He says he felt insecure when certain people had opinions different from his own. He interpreted disagreement as personal hostility. He says the same thing about

conflicts (EPSS,143). This could make him close-minded, rigid and over-insistent on laws (rules).

The accompaniment: J. Vanier's thoughts on this are based on his own experience. "[P]ersonally, I was helped by Father Thomas Philippe when I left the navy in 1950. [...] I needed this model who helped me discover how to find a direction in my own life, I needed this master of humanity and philosophy to help me train my intelligence [this dimension is reiterated p. 123] ; I needed this spiritual father to help me in my spiritual journey; he loved me and gave me confidence in myself". This excerpt comes after having said that young people need true witnesses, authentic guides who will help them integrate the law, which means that he places T Philippe in this category. Later, he adds that he benefited from this accompaniment for 46 years. T Philippe did not give him advice, he asked him the right questions related to the goal he was pursuing. He told him: "If we loved the goal enough, we would choose the right means" (EPSS, 180).

Fears and personal anxieties: these are numerous, but the most terrible fear is the fear of being abandoned or betrayed (EPSS, 150), but also betraying others: "One of the greatest bereavements of life is the bereavement of honour, the fact of being despised or seen as someone who betrayed a cause" (EPSS, 150). We can also add the fear of his own violence, discovered through contacts with people with disabilities (EPSS,181).

The Calling: J. Vanier left the navy in 1950 "to follow Jesus" (EPSS, 200). He says he discovered the spiritual world at the time of his philosophical and theological training, from being with T Philippe at L'Eau Vive (which he never names). He considers having learned how to pray at that time.

REFLECTIONS ON THESE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SNIPPETS

An incomplete narrative

The type of writing chosen by J. Vanier – autobiographical snippets scattered in a book – is an easy way to avoid any precise chronology, and therefore bury the most problematic period of his life, between 1950 and 1963. This period seems, for the most part, to be covered by his studies and teaching, up until that precise moment when T Philippe

called on him to meet people with disabilities, "his new friends", in 1963. However, archival research shows, on the contrary, how important the period was when J. Vanier was director of L'Eau Vive (1952-1956), deeply involved in the group of the "initiates" and actively and secretly supportive of T Philippe, breaking the rules of the canonical trial of 1956. Archives also show that it is an exaggeration to refer to J. Vanier as a teacher, since he only taught for one semester – at the most – in Toronto (Canada) before returning to France. J. Vanier has the ability to give readers the feeling they are reading an authentic narrative full of humble reticence. Only informed readers can spot the "blanks" and meaningful silences.

Some distinctions need to be drawn regarding J. Vanier's humility, since he only praises a single person by his side, T Philippe. While he mentions many assistants and collaborators essential to the life of L'Arche, none of them seems to have any significant weight in the decision-making process for the future of L'Arche. He positions himself as "commander", the only true captain on board, even if he says he had evolved in his leadership model (EPSS, 138). The evolution he describes seems mainly psychological: disagreements no longer feel to him like personal attacks. A corresponding behavioural change would need to be confirmed by his collaborators¹.

Another silence exists regarding his childhood: his relationship with his mother. And yet, in this book, highly anthropological in nature, J. Vanier places heavy emphasis on the mother-child relationship and the importance of this mutual love from birth as a fundamental point of reference for growth in communion. From this point of view, his complete silence about his own mother (except in her old age, EPSS, 155) becomes striking. There is a sort of great void² which appears to be filled by his personal meeting with T Philippe, much later, at the age of 22.

Finally, nothing is said about the bonds that existed between T Philippe and J. Vanier's parents, especially with his mother Pauline, who considered T Philippe her spiritual director. J. Vanier does not

1. The leadership model developed by J. Vanier is discussed from a sociological standpoint in chap. 12.

2. The bond between J. Vanier and his mother is discussed from a different point of view by the psychoanalyst N. Jeammet, chap. 19.

mention that his parents were the ones who guided him towards T Philippe and L'Eau Vive when he left the navy. Why doesn't he publicly acknowledge this¹?

A narrative devoted to conversion

In this same book (EPSS), J. Vanier describes how his life's path was marked by two significant moments of conversion, linked to his encounters with T Philippe and people with disabilities.

A spiritual and intellectual conversion through meeting T Philippe

T Philippe already knew the Vanier family. Yet the first time J. Vanier met him personally and spent considerable time with him, T Philippe became his accompanier, or "master", both spiritually and intellectually. This leads to J. Vanier's first essentially spiritual conversion, which takes place as early as 1950. He describes it as follows: "I had the impression that he knew, that he guessed all that was good or bad in me – my secret –, that he loved me and accepted me as I was. It was liberating to me. It is wonderful to be seen, to be recognised as a person who has a destiny and a mission". Here, the destiny of all human beings, as we shall see in the next point, is communion. The secret, again, according to this book, echoes the presence of God in oneself, even in the "mud", in "the world of our own darkness" (EPSS, 268, 279). It is true that the wording of the sentence quoted above could make one think of a "shameful" secret, a troubling guilt from which J. Vanier might have needed to break free, but we do not have any clues to go in that direction. The other interpretation suggested by this book is the need for each person to find his or her "land" (EPSS, 123), his profound and secret identity. This easily corresponds to his own transition from life as a navy officer to a life of "following Jesus" and pursuing his own vocation. Therefore, even if it is impossible to come to a definite interpretation of "my secret", this last lead remains the most solid. It is coherent with another book in which he says more explicitly that T Philippe revealed to him his "secret name, that is to say [his] mission" (BH, 139).

1. Historical elements that were presented in chap. 1: letters from J. Vanier to his parents clearly show this recognition.

This narrative is surprising for the theologian, as the figure of Jesus is not central; it is masked by the figure of T Philippe. The desire to follow Jesus is present and very real, but the accompanier takes a prominent place here. He is characterized as a "model" and a "master in humanity" (EPSS, 120), even though J. Vanier knew about the content of the canonical trial and the constant abuse perpetrated by T Philippe (almost up until his death in 1993). He does not seem to have any cognitive distance from his model. The phrase about the "bereavement of honour" (EPSS, 150) suggests that J. Vanier has always forbidden himself to question¹ his master. It is even more surprising to see a Christian putting his own honour before that of God and victims! This internal contradiction disappears if we assume that J. Vanier still subscribes to T Philippe's esoteric and mystical theory, since in that case, there would be no more victims – everything is for the Glory of God!

In sum, J. Vanier, who no longer mentions mysticism in this book, still remains an advocate and disciple of T Philippe, even after his death.

His narrative² does not correspond to narratives of vocation in biblical and ecclesial tradition, which are centred on God/Jesus; in these, human intervention remains in the background as needed, to help discernment, to authenticate the origin of the calling, and to establish the ecclesial bond³. A relational conversion through an encounter with people with disabilities: the discovery of communion (?).

This encounter and the beginning of community life with two people with disabilities, Raphaël and Philippe, are described here as the time of relational conversion. It is the discovery of a life of communion, through

1. Has he ever wanted to do so? Unfortunately, nothing suggests it.

2. I was expecting to find a narrative of vocation, especially in J. Vanier's most spiritual books, but I did not find anything about this, despite the profusion of mystical vocabulary. It is in this anthropological book that we end up finding most materials.

3. One needs only to reread St Paul's vocation in Ac 9:1-19, for example, in which Saul hears the call of Jesus; it is then Ananias who has the mission to welcome him and baptize him, therefore authenticating this calling in order for him to be able to join the community of the disciples of Jesus (two other narratives dealing with this vocation can be found in Ac 22:4-21; 26:9-18 with the same type of structure). The ecclesial authentication remains fundamental, since "in this field sometimes nothing is more similar to authenticity than illusion, and the force of personal conviction may be a blindness about oneself, or even a sort of unavowed simulation, as if unconscious" (André GODIN in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Dictionary of Spirituality), Beauchesne, 1994, art. "vocation", col. 1124).

the most fragile among us. This conversion apparently began in 1963-1964. And yet, this discovery of “communion” is already perceptible in the way J. Vanier mentions his relationship with T Philippe. Furthermore, archival research¹ shows the importance of relationships within L'Eau Vive, as well as experiences of “communion” with women in this group of “initiates”. It is therefore difficult to corroborate this chronology.

However, this relational conversion did take a new turn through community life with people with disabilities. This would thus be a third experience of conversion, expounded upon in many of his books as a discovery of the reversal of values: strength in weakness, wealth in poverty, greatness in the small and in service, the presence of God in the poor... These elements are erased here in this presentation of relational conversion as a communion. Why?

Almost fourteen years separate these two types of initiatory meetings, but the connection is made by T Philippe, who “welcomes” J. Vanier in 1950 and then “invites” him in 1963 to live close to people with mental disabilities. This call (which is not initially experienced as God's call) will become a “vocation”, “mission” in communion with T Philippe. Looking back on his story, J. Vanier interprets the work of L'Arche as a work of God and sees himself as chosen by God².

In many ways, L'Arche is a success, although I am convinced that all of this is not my work, but the work of God; there is a certain peace and joy in feeling myself supported and loved by so many friends, brothers and sisters, having been chosen by God to experience this reality of L'Arche, and having had a fruitful life (EPSS, 150).

1.1 In the historical section, see chap. 2: “Feminine Sociabilities”.

2. In reality, T Philippe had already told J. Vanier during his time at L'Eau Vive that he had been chosen by Mary to carry out spiritual work; progressively, after the closure of L'Eau Vive, this work will be interpreted as being that of L'Arche. Here is what T Philippe wrote to J. Vanier in about 1954 (undated) : “It seems to me that in this spiritual work, Mary wants first and foremost the holiness of the people that She chose, who may not be [illegible word]. I hope that I will be able to see you again soon, for I believe more and more in the importance of the studies you undertook, which are for me a sign that She chose you to be among her instruments... There is a [mysterious?] convergence and She seemed to give a small premonition of its points of culmination... But for certain, much more than a work of doctrine, it is a spiritual work that She has in mind: a work of divine love through smallness and therefore much humility”, APJV (E2/F8/D7).

Conclusion of this point 1

Through his books, J. Vanier explicitly talks about T Philippe without ever displaying any cognitive distance, even after the death of T Philippe. He sees him as an *almost* Christ-like figure and gives him a central role in his life and in his vocation.

In some books, he talks about this in a more implicit way. Certain passages are quite ambiguous.

The face of the innocent

In *Ton silence m'appelle* (Your Silence Is Calling Me) (YSCM, 1971), J. Vanier insists on the transformation achieved by the Holy Spirit. By changing our hearts, the Spirit also changes our relationship to laws and conventions, and opens up human beings to a new kind of freedom. At first glance, these assertions do not seem problematic, but we need to take a closer look at them, in this somewhat lengthy passage:

Next there is the innocence of the one who becomes acquainted with evil..., who lives close to evil, who through his actions, his gaze, the silence of his peace, transforms evil. He can take this evil in his flesh and transform it under the breath of the Spirit to save, to communicate this peace that floods him and that he cannot contain. The barriers break down under a loving weight. The actions he undertakes may seem reprehensible [passage on Jesus and prophets]. This innocent man, the world cannot receive him, His presence condemns. The clarity of his eyes is not that of the child who tries to attract attention and uses his charms, not that of the ignorant and the naive, but that of the man who knows the consequences of his actions, who knows that before men and the law, he may seem crazy or morally reprehensible, but who prefers to let himself be drawn to this other law, the eternal law of the individual and his love and his truth. Faced with conventions, he is free, free from his own flesh in the sense of St Paul, for he has been transformed by a breath from Above. The world does not love free people because it feels judged by them. The world cannot classify them into social groups anymore, as it loves to do. The innocent man is the free man who has become a slave to the Spirit“ (YSCM, 78-80)¹.

1. We have been forced to add punctuation (commas or full stops) as this excerpt is part of meditation pages whose writing is presented as a prose poem with few punctuation marks. We have underlined some elements.

Who is the innocent man in this excerpt?

It is the human being transformed by the “breath from Above”, the Holy Spirit. J. Vanier is joining the traditional theological narrative of creation renewed in Jesus Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is not about Jesus, even though the interpolated clause that we have deleted talks about him and the prophets who managed to break free from conventions. J. Vanier seems to have included this clause to keep the reader's attention focused on an orthodox interpretation in which Jesus is the innocent man, unjustly condemned. But by removing the interpolated clause, we see more clearly that the new freedom focuses on relationship to the law (not capitalized in the text). We thus remain on a societal level, consistent with conventions.

The expression “free from his own flesh” makes one think of both T Philippe and J. Vanier himself. What does the expression “in the sense of St Paul” add?

A comment from T Philippe might help clarify this for us, since J. Vanier says nothing about it. Current research on St Paul demonstrate the need to return to the Semitic use of “flesh”. The word refers to the whole being “in its exteriority and its visible manifestations¹”, not to a part of the body. There is another interpretation of St Paul that mentions the disorders of the “flesh” opening to spiritual death. This phenomenon happens when the “flesh” no longer obeys the command of the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:5-6.9.12).

J. Vanier is indeed referring to this second meaning, at least to a certain extent. Is it to be understood that man renewed by the Spirit is free in his sexuality? The knowledge acquired today of the charges against T Philippe, which date back to long before this book², seem to corroborate this. We are once again faced with a dangerous shift in J. Vanier's thinking, into which the Spirit whispers strange propositions!

1. Julienne CÔTE, *Cent mots-clés de la théologie de Paul* (A Hundred Key Words of Paul's Theology), Novalis/Cerf, 2000, p. 72.

2. The historical investigation conducted by Florian MICHEL and Antoine MOURGES demonstrates that J. Vanier knew as of 1956 the result of Thomas Philippe's canonical trial and that he was himself an “initiate” as of 1952.

Another passage appears to confirm that the innocent is first and foremost T Philippe himself, with a very apparent carnal dimension, even though it is spiritualised.

You, innocent man, you can touch the world, the substance and the other, not in order to take them for yourself by ripping them from another [...] Your touch is thus like the touch of Jesus, a touch of softness, tenderness, life, that heals. “O delicate touch, which transforms death into life (Saint John of the Cross)” (YSCM, 82).

The fact that he uses a quotation from St John of the Cross cannot hide the shift from the purely spiritual touch of God in the soul to the innocent man's carnal touch, as suggested by J. Vanier. He quotes the last text of St John of the Cross, which elaborates upon the state of spiritual marriage: *The Living Flame of Love*. This comes from the end of the second stanza of the poem “Song of the soul in its intimate union with God”, or is at least very close to it: “O very sweet cautery! O delightful wound! O gentle hand! Delicate touch, which has a taste of eternity, through you any debt is paid off! You give me death: death is changed to life”¹. The comment made by St John of the Cross² specifies that death is “the complete destruction of the old man”, in reference to the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians (Eph 4:22-24). This implies the purification of reason, will and memory of all natural appetites³. Life is spiritual perfection here, that is to say, the perfect union with God. The soul lives the life of God as it is in God. All these powers are turned towards God. Therefore, all is driven by the Holy Spirit. Thus, death, through progressive sobriety, has become a new life. We are far here from what was suggested by inserting this quotation into comments on the innocent man.

In a subsequent book, *Les Signes des temps* (*The Signs of The Times*) (2012), the face of the innocent returns in a different way, while developing a hypothesis on authority and one's personal conscience. In this case, J. Vanier appeals to the Thomistic tradition, which is very rare for him.

1. John of the Cross, *La Vive Flamme d'amour* (The Living Flame of Love), Cerf, 1994, p. 39 (we underlined the words which inspire J. Vanier).

2. John of the Cross, *ibid.*, cf. Explanation, no. 32-33, p. 91-92.

3. Cf. John of the Cross, *ibid.*, p.92-93.

He refers to the Dominican Cajetan (1469-1534), known for being one of the most accurate¹ scholars on Thomas Aquinas.

Cardinal Cajetan, the scholar on Thomas Aquinas, said that a silenced priest, who was therefore banned from saying Mass, could celebrate mass with a servant, if he knew in good conscience he was innocent, as long as they both kept it secret. For if anyone were to learn that he celebrated mass in spite of being forbidden to do so, it would either amount to creating a scandal by exposing those who had unfairly charged him, or to criticism by exposing himself to people's lack of understanding. This is very subtle. This priest tries to accept a judgment he considers to be wrong, without giving up his conscience, but without expressing any open criticism either, because he wants to avoid scandal (TST, 101-102).

At first glance, the reader understands that no one can give up following one's conscience, even when an authority has rendered its verdict. Here authority is considered as a potentially arbitrary power, with a distorted judgement.

If we put this in context, in the background we have the situation of T Philippe, who had long been forbidden from the sacramental ministry, including the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation². A second reading allows to make out that J. Vanier implicitly admits here that he has been in this position of the "servant" bound to secrecy. It is a way for J. Vanier to honour the memory of T Philippe and explain their common attitudes. While he does not explicitly deem T Philippe innocent, he gives primacy to one's personal conscience by masking all the consequences. He forgets that one's personal conscience must always be held in check by the necessity of loving thy neighbour (or, at a minimum, to do no harm), taking care to seek clarification in the opinions of others.

Conclusion on this point

In making use of the mystical tradition of St John of the Cross and the Thomist tradition, J. Vanier distorts his references. He uses them to

1. Cf. the presentation of Cajetan in *Catholicisme* (Catholicism), *op. cit.*, col. 367-369.

2. Conclusions of the canonical trial of 1956 (archives CDF 214/1952-86601 on T Philippe).

bolster his own convictions, in an effort to prove his master innocent, as well as to justify his own silence.

Is this how J. Vanier expects to exonerate T Philippe from his actions and explain his own position? The discourse is so ambiguous that it is sometimes difficult to know for whom it is actually intended. Are we dealing with a subtext intended, beyond all other readers, for his small group of "initiates"?

Language as text and subtext, for general readers and "initiates"?

We have just seen excerpts revealing real questions as to the possible existence of a subtext skilfully constructed by J. Vanier. However, in the book *Le Corps brisé* (*The Broken Body*) (TBB, 1989), many pages had this same questioning effect on our reading. Many passages would require further analysis, including other books (we also include an example here taken from *Ne crains pas* (*Be Not Afraid*) (BNA, 1978). The four following examples address different themes, with some clues indicating this possibility of a double level of language. No example is convincing on its own and some examples can even give the impression of trying to blame the author. On the other hand, the accumulation of these examples gives weight to the argument. We can only give a few of them here within this framework.

A TOTAL MAN-WOMAN COMMUNION

The danger that men and women face is precisely to look for the other to fill up this emptiness. But when they are cut off from the source of love that is God, they neither fulfil the other nor satisfy their need for total communion. [...] When communion with God is broken, total communion with the other is impossible (TBB, 35).

This passage raises questions, since it shows a yearning for total communion between man and woman (the subject is indeed addressed later as a communion of hearts, spirits and sexualities). This total communion appears to be fusional and without respect for the individuality of each person. God's role is not really precise, for even though God is the origin of all impulse of love and reciprocal giving, it is not the communion of faith in God, the fact of being connected to the same source,

i.e. God himself, that opens up the communion of human beings on all levels. That said, we know this confusion exists among the “initiates” and that J. Vanier is one of them.

JESUS AND MARY

[The Word made flesh] will be the new Adam, finding his joy in the new Eve – Jesus finding his joy in the Woman Mary. And they will lead people to the knowledge of the Father, at the heart of the ecstasy of the Trinity, at the feast of the wedding party (TBB, 43).

While the identification of Jesus and Mary to the new Adam and new Eve is demonstrated in the Scriptures and the Tradition, this passage remains very ambiguous. It presents the son/mother relationship as a husband/wife relationship through the expression “finding his joy” and “the feast of the wedding party”. This presentation really seems to correspond to Father Thomas’s spirituality of “initiates”.

On the same theme, J. Vanier reminds us that Mary welcomed Jesus in his infantile smallness and in the smallness of her own maternal body. He describes this day as an ecstasy.

On the day the angel appeared to her, and the Spirit of God overshadowed her, when the Word of God was conceived in her, in peaceful ecstasy, that very night she fell asleep wrapped in love, thrilling with joy, her heart burning with a new fire. The Word made flesh in her body! At that precise moment, God and creation embraced each other: the wedding feast was celebrated within Mary (TBB, 4).

The vocabulary he uses again refers to the mystical path of spiritual marriage. All of this gives the feeling that J. Vanier thinks that he is inspired with revelations that he sprinkles throughout his texts in a language of mystical connotations...

IMPORTANCE OF THE BODY OF JESUS FOR MARY

Mary is mentioned again, through the way she took care of Jesus’ body as a child, in order to valorise the importance of Jesus’ body. The evocation becomes very mystical in nature, mixing the concrete idea of mothering with a spiritual reading that is quite mysterious:

In order to receive the gift of Jesus’ body, we need to contemplate the Woman who conceived him, who gave him birth, Mary. No one enveloped his body, touched it, loved it, washed it, and venerated it like her. The body of Christ was born from her own body, it is the fruit of her womb. The body of Mary fed Jesus’ body; her breasts provided him with the milk necessary to its growth. Her touch protected him and revealed to him that he was loved. [...] For thirty years she was close to his body, she fed it and was herself nourished by his presence, his real presence. For thirty years she was unified and sanctified by the tenderness and silence of the body of Jesu. (TBB, 74).

A form of reciprocity is emphasised between these two bodies, Mary’s body and Jesus’ body. The body becomes in itself a spiritual element through the eucharistic vocabulary (gift of the body, real presence, nourishment). The mystical dimension is also evoked through the insistence of the image of the breast which is found in the *Spiritual Canticle* by Saint John of the Cross: “There He gave me the breast, He taught me science, I gave myself to Him wholeheartedly, by giving absolutely everything; I pledged to be His bride”¹. For St John of the Cross, this is indeed the soul giving itself to God, and God reciprocating. J. Vanier changes the reference to a reciprocal gift between the bodies themselves. The image of the “breast” is so important that J. Vanier took the time to mention the Greek term used for “breast” in a previous book, *Ne crains pas (Be Not Afraid)* (BNA, 39). He made a connection between two passages of St John, one in which the disciple John, during the Last Supper, leans over Jesus’ chest (breast) (Jn 13:25), and another in which Jesus is “in the Father’s breast” (Jn 1:18). All these threads of thought intermingle in this excerpt. There is something for everyone!

THE BODY OF JESUS “DOCILE TO GRACE”

Jesus is not just any prophet [...] His words are important, but even more important are his person, his heart and his body. It was his body, through his intelligence alone, that radiated the perfection of divine force. It was in his body, a channel perfectly docile to grace, that he was in total receptivity to the power and love of the Father (TBB, 50)².

1. John of the Cross, *Le Cantique Spirituel* (Spiritual Canticle), Cerf, 1980, p. 179.

2. Cf. also the discussion on the body in the “Washing of the Feet” (p. 59). The presentation of the Washing of the Feet is very different there from the one he will make later on to illustrate authority of service.

Such an emphasis on the physical body of Jesus, otherwise rare, is also developed in the rest of this book. This rehabilitation of the body can be understood through an anthropological perspective which unites all the aspects of the individual, who fights against the depreciation of the body experienced for long by Christians. This aspect can unfortunately also serve as support for the “initiates” who have erotic spiritual practices. If the body is considered as a privileged channel for grace, it is easy to justify many gestures between a spiritual father and the people he accompanies. “Perfect docility” was indeed required during physical touching, particularly by T Philippe, according to the testimony of women accompanied and abused by him.

Conclusion of this point: the possibility of deliberately ambiguous writing, directed at a wide audience but also at “initiates”, appears more than probable to us, especially in the first published books. The phenomenon diminishes through time, but persists up to the relatively recent book, *Les Signes des temps (The Signs of the Times)* (2012). We still find signs of T Philippe’s doctrine and the desire to defend him and to spread his thought. J. Vanier has the intelligence of using a veiled and hidden language for sensitive topics.

Conclusion

J. Vanier’s construction of his autobiographical narrative proves to be very fragile in light of the historical facts and the Christian conception of personal conversion. The three types of conversions mentioned (spiritual, intellectual and relational) are related to significant human encounters. They are indeed those of T Philippe and people with disabilities, frequently mentioned. Yet, in a hidden way, feminine relationships appear within *L’Eau Vive* for an experience of communion in the image of the relationship he experienced with his spiritual father. We emphasised the *almost* Christ-like figure of this figure, while the personal calling of Jesus Christ is sorely missing here. This seems inconsistent with J. Vanier’s devotion to the Gospels and faithfulness to Jesus through his relationship with the poorest. We cannot eliminate this paradox of a double fidelity to T Philippe and Jesus Christ, unless

we are talking about an unfortunate (con)fusion between these two figures.

Thus, J. Vanier’s filiation to T Philippe cannot be ignored. Not only is there is no questioning of the thought and actions of this “spiritual father”, but a strong belief in his innocence is revealed. This is expressed through subtext skilfully and intentionally constructed. Moreover, the desire to share and transmit his way of conceiving of the relationship to the body, touching, the relationships between Mary and Jesus, etc., is often disclosed. Distinguishing between voluntary transmission and the reflection of integrated thought arising here and there, remains problematic.

All of this is drowned out by the larger discussion which essentially concerns relationship with people with disabilities, community life and the preferential love of Jesus for the “little ones”. Therefore, the reader gravitates towards this fundamental message and does not pay attention to all these strange, short passages.

GENERAL CONCLUSION OF PART 7.

The wheat and the chaff

Gwennola Rimbaut

Throughout his writings, J. Vanier was able to defend the dignity of people with mental disabilities and more generally, “wounded” people. He gives a distinguished role to these people in the conversion of each individual and for the transformation of their relatives (family, community, the Church, society), if we learn how to welcome them in a benevolent and friendly relationship. They are in command of a profound change of the “living-together”, if we know how to listen to them and take their suffering into account. Furthermore, through simple language reminding us of the loving closeness of Jesus to the poor, through his freedom of speech and choice of living, J. Vanier has met many of his readers’ expectations, especially those of Christians.

However, critical analysis of his books brings to light a large number of flaws, some of which prove to be serious. The list is significant: issues with interpretation of the Scriptures, departure from the Catholic ecclesial institution, implicit claims of being a “spiritual master”, a tendency to essentialize and sacralise the “poor”, a spirituality of covenant and communion tending towards a nuptial fusion, all of this adding up to a very uncertain theological rooting in which elements of the thought of his spiritual father, T Philippe, resurface. The desire to prove his spiritual guide innocent and to justify his own silence to the very end, seals this long list.

These negative points are both very visible, yet buried in a very allusive discourse, without any structured argumentation, with few or no

references to famous authors, and none to renowned Catholic theologians. These writings are essentially self-referenced, without any comparison to other people's thoughts. Open-mindedness towards other religions or ecumenism does not alter this anti-intellectual spirit. We remain in a discussion of convictions with a beautiful ideal, often presented in striking and appealing language, but riddled with dangerous pitfalls.

These convictions are conspicuously asserted, but sometimes hidden in passages that can be interpreted in many different ways, hence the feeling of uneasiness experienced by the attentive reader. J. Vanier seems to be playing hide and seek with words and reveals a complex and disturbing personality. It is not our task to proceed further into an area that falls more within the field of psychology (or psychiatry) than theology¹. Theologians who seek to untangle threads of discussion continually struggle, detecting tracks that get lost in the sand... However, contrary to the Philippe brothers and their uncle Dehau, J. Vanier does not consider himself a theologian. He chose a genre of spiritual writing which offers more freedom and less ecclesial control².

The conclusion of this long "investigation" leads us to confirm that J. Vanier operates on two distinctive levels. The first one is based on an intimate and secret mysticism related to "spiritual marriage" with the aforementioned distortions. These will most likely be more accurately identified by the Dominicans' study of T Philippe's writings, since the mental universe of J. Vanier remains very connected to him. The second level relates to a spirituality of commitment (covenant) to the "poor". These two levels are combined as if they were progressively unified under the term of communion. The two levels communicate but do not coincide. There is no mysticism shared with the "poor", even though they are sacralised through identification with the figure of Jesus himself. The communion with them is not mystical as defined by J. Vanier,

1. A debate raged within our Study Commission to determine whether J. Vanier was or was not intentionally hiding his thought, whether he knowingly or unknowingly used language with a secondary level of subtext. Did T Philippe's dominance over him annihilate his personal freedom?

2. The Catholic Church's blacklisting has disappeared (last update in 1961) and only the work of teaching theologians is still examined by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

in the sense of being drawn to a nuptial union. It is essentially emotional, psychological and human. This difference has probably prevented "mystical-sexual" abuses from happening to them.

This limitation regarding communion with people with mental disabilities proves to be positive, since it eliminated possible abuse. However, it opens up a new question. Why does J. Vanier never discuss these people in terms of their own unique spirituality? While he recognises their spiritual depth by claiming, in his usual vocabulary, that they possess a "conscience of love rather than a rational conscience" (MW, 44), he does not delve further into what they could pass on to us, or share with us on the level of faith, Christian or other. Paradoxically, a form of denial of the original spiritual existence¹ appears here, marked by the seal of the experience of disability.

At times, the two levels – of intimate spirituality and the spirituality of commitment – join together and have concrete consequences. For instance, the way he envisions spiritual transmission to assistants is impacted. J. Vanier is very attached to a filiation-oriented accompaniment, which assumes "communion" with a "model" accompanier. This bond then becomes a place of possible abuse. In addition, his anti-intellectualism, which we notice in the primacy of communion seen as a departure from reason, probably impeded any in-depth multidisciplinary reflection within L'Arche. Although J. Vanier gives consideration to the psychological dimension, especially necessary in the accompaniment of "wounded" people, he plays with confusion between the mystic and the spiritual without ever questioning the connection between the two. This confusion unfortunately contributes to the process of psychological control over accompanied members.

The fact that so many have focused on L'Arche as a great achievement, without seeing the rest, demonstrates the great strength of its aspirations for living authentically and fraternally with "wounded" people, and the

1. J. Vanier has a very different approach from that of Joseph Wresinski. The latter initiated, very early on, academic research on the original experience of the very poor, including their experience of faith. We have also tried, to the best of our abilities, to contribute to this in the past few years. Cf. Gwennola RIMBAUT, *Les Pauvres : interdits de spiritualité : La foi des chrétiens du Quart Monde* (The Poor : Banned from Spirituality? The Faith of tFourth World Christians), L'Harmattan, 2009.

profound admiration for this publicly recognised founder. Another major factor is the striking lack of health facilities worthy of the name, with interminable waiting lists of so many parents who have children with mental disabilities, which leads to a lack of vigilance. Even so, it is strange to see the blindness of even highly competent intellectuals and theologians who have never questioned the substance of J. Vanier's teachings – or at least not publicly¹. This silence may have led people to believe that there was nothing wrong. It even became tacit approval through the many prestigious awards he received (including the Paul IV Prize in 1997 and the *Pacem in Terris* Award in 2013) which increased his aura of sainthood².

This sort of approval was strengthened by the widely-acknowledged relationship between J. Vanier and the bishops of France, who even went so far as to invite him every year to Lourdes for the Assembly of the French Episcopal Conference³. As a consequence, J. Vanier's spirituality appeared, in the eyes of all, to be genuinely Christian: "The common core, essential to all authentic Christian spirituality, is the succession of Jesus under the direction of the Church"⁴.

That said, can we answer, at least in part, the questions that L'Arche asked our Study Commission? In particular, did J. Vanier try to pass on T Philippe's esoteric teaching through his writing?

Answering this requires making distinctions. On the one hand, the primary aim of his books is to inspire the vocation of living in community with "wounded" people. They valorise the blessing that the "little ones" represent and question, understandably, the way we live in society and as a Church, leaving them on the fringes of society. Consequently, these books contributed to responding to the needs of a generation in search of ideals and religious forms with greater simplicity, warmth and community spirit⁵. On the other hand, the elements of T Philippe's

1. We pointed out (in chapter 20) that privately, criticism has been made about J. Vanier's theological and biblical weakness. Cf. our note No.18.

2. Cf. historical part, chapter 5: "The Saint and the Star".

3. J. Vanier's personal archives mention this and have been preserved at King's College.

4. Henrique Cristiano Jose MATOS, "La spiritualité de Nazareth », *Lettre aux fraternités de la Fraternité sacerdotale* (The Spirituality of Nazareth, A Letter to the Fraternities of the Priestly Fraternity), No. 196, October 2008, p. 1.

5. Cf. the contextual analysis of new communities in France in Celine HOYEAU, *La Trahison des pères*, (The Betrayal of Fathers), Bayard, 2021, p. 53-107.

teaching most visible in J. Vanier's writings relate to anthropology, "the little ones" "consciousness of love", and the significance of touching and tenderness in the relationship between parents and infants. These elements are always present in J. Vanier's books and are indeed inherited from T Philippe (even though they are rarely referenced as such).

These elements might appear to be quite insignificant and refute a possible intention to pass on the essence of T Philippe's esoteric teachings. Yet, this anthropological core is essential to the doctrine in which body and sexuality are involved in a mysticism centred on the nuptial union. This is precisely where J. Vanier most clearly shows a form of allegiance and a will to pass on this fake mysticism. His conception of the covenant and communion as a nuptial ritual, minimising people's individuality, is proof of this. The experience and teaching he received during his years at L'Eau Vive under T Philippe's spiritual supervision remain underlying factors.

Despite unwavering devotion to his spiritual master, J. Vanier takes liberties with him (especially after his death¹). Though an heir to his thinking, he invents his own spiritual path, mixed with psychology, creating a form of universal mysticism that includes the perspective of a nuptial communion. It is therefore reasonable to say that he has inherited a way of thinking and living in communion which is favourable to spiritual and sexual abuse, especially in accompaniments, rather than a structured religious education faithful to T Philippe. J. Vanier does not consider himself to be an intellectual or a theologian: his texts lack the precision necessary for us to define the mystical doctrine that constantly flows through them, deforming and falsifying the tradition of Carmelite mysticism.

Finally, it becomes difficult to separate the good wheat from the chaff in each of J. Vanier's books², since these elements comeingle in an inextricable way. They show the human complexity of this founding figure whose harmful dimension cannot be denied. The Doctrinal

1. From the beginning of the communities of L'Arche, the ecumenical dimension was a source of tension between them. It should also be noted that the position of Mary, which is central to Thomas Philippe's mysticism, is barely present in J. Vanier's writing.

2. Some of his books are less problematic than others, for instance: the first version of *La Communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête* (Community and Growth).

Commission of the French Bishops' Conference encourages us to think with discernment without judging the person himself¹.

What seems to matter most now is to look to the future and further explore the enriching and original experience of the communities of L'Arche. This can take many directions: continuing to build the spirituality experienced within L'Arche² from the experience of living together with people with disabilities; fostering the cross-disciplinary development (human sciences, philosophy and theology) of this experience, based on welcoming, in every possible sense, the vulnerable person; envisioning a cross-analysis of facts, information and know-how³ gathered from assistants, people with disabilities and intellectuals on themes which are of interest to every member of the communities of L'Arche. This "merging of knowledge", initiated by Joseph Wresinski and developed by the movement ATD-Fourth World, could be used to shed light on the great worth of people with disabilities.

1. Cf. "L'arbre et ses fruits : Trouble ecclésial lié à la fécondité spirituelle des personnalités perverses" (The Tree and Its Fruit: Ecclesial Trouble Related to the Spiritual Fecundity of Perverse Personalities) (March 9th, 2021). This text allows us to make a distinction between the work and the fruit it bears. Here the work refers to L'Arche, but its spiritual fruit is negative, since it refers to sexual abuse and leadership abuse within the relationship of accompaniment.

2. L'Arche in France adopts a similar approach with the help of Christian SALENSON. Cf. the session of November 29th-30th, 2017: "L'Arche, a Community of Faith" (faith here meaning the conviction that weakness is a source of life, rather than adherence to a belief related to a religion). This theologian discusses and compares the experience of meeting people with mental disabilities to the experience of the Easter mystery, of life in the heart of weakness, an experience open to all people, whether Christian or not. He is the author of: *Bouleversante Fragilité, l'Arche à l'épreuve du handicap* (Overwhelming Fragility, L'Arche Standing the Test of Disability), Nouvelle Cité, 2016.

3. Group of research Fourth World – University, *Le Croisement des savoirs*, (The Merging of Knowledge) ed. L'Atelier/Quart Monde, 1999.

General conclusion

In conclusion, it is hardly possible to return to all the points raised in this report. At the end of more than two years of investigation, because of the intimate correspondence and all the archives made accessible by the conservation institutions, thanks to the precise and courageous testimonies of the victims and of very many witnesses, because of the documents written by Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier themselves, we were able to analyse the mechanisms deployed by the two men from the inside: influence, sexual abuse, collective delirium, theological corruption of notions at the heart of Christianity, spiritual deviation, manipulation, incestuous representations of relationships between Jesus and Mary. The file is heavy. The diagnosis may seem harsh. It is now not without support.

The institutional aspects, which must be underlined, are to be paired up with the individual aspects. It is also, tragically, misguided human freedom, psychiatric illness, fragility, affective and sexual immaturity, or a kind of *imbecillitas*, in the old sense of the term, in the sense of physical, moral, intellectual weakness, which are revealed in the holds and abuses, and which also explain, among other causes, the misunderstandings and procrastination of the authorities. It is necessary to broaden the intelligence of the dossier by also considering the “spirit of the times” in the Catholic world and in the society of the time: general misunderstanding of the phenomenon of “abuse”, development of certain traits of a “charismatic” spirituality, which also open up founding figures to adulation, even idolatry.

Without, however, going back over each of these fundamental aspects, we would like, in an attempt to conclude, to reweave a few threads from this story. From 1950 to 2019, we followed the joint itineraries of Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier, examined the developments of the sectarian nucleus which was able to be born, grow and maintain itself around them in its beliefs and practices, and finally, observed the evolutions of the works that the two men founded and animated (L'Eau Vive, L'Arche).

This incredible persistence of a perverse nucleus through the decades raises questions. How could such a group, although unmasked in the mid-1950s, have been able to maintain itself until the 2010s, over some 80 years? This question calls other questions. How, after the founding of L'Arche, did this group manage not to be perceived as sectarian by the numerous members of this international federation of communities that is L'Arche? How was it able to evade the various ecclesial authorities which had investigated the L'Eau Vive affair, that is to say, to varying degrees, the diocese of Paris, the leaders of the Dominicans and of the Carmelites, the Holy Office, or who were (in theory at least) in charge of the application of the sentences pronounced (the diocese of Beauvais)?

The elements highlighted and analysed by the various authors of this report, without completely exhausting these questions, provide some answers.

We must first note the failure of the 1956 measures and try to understand the reasons for this failure. The sanctions adopted did not produce the expected effects, since they do not put an end to the existence of the sectarian core. Was justice been mishandled? Is it due to lack of a good diagnosis (medical, psychiatric) made on the people concerned? The "fanaticism" of the members of the group had however been well perceived by the Holy Office.

We observe that the cohesion of the group is such that those who remained free to circulate found sufficient mutual support to maintain their delusional collective beliefs. They developed a feeling of persecution and the intimate conviction of a divine election, which contributed to strengthening their cohesion. M.- D.Philippe, affected by sanctions, also contributed to maintaining the "insiders" in loyalty to his brother.

The social status of the families concerned (Philippe, Vanier, Halluin, Rosambo), that is to say both financial well-being and "society"

recognition, also contributed to their quiet resolution to oppose the hierarchy. and the tricks with which the group developed clandestine practices of to circumvent the sanctions. The human networks, the financial resources and the notoriety of the families concerned are one of the keys to the success of L'Eau Vive and L'Arche. This constant family support gave the "insiders" the capacity to oppose the Dominican province of France between 1952 and 1956. Jean Vanier was also able to mobilise the vast network of his parents' connections. The birth of L'Arche then fully benefited from it. The sociological study shows how much the rapid growth of the organization is due to the cultural and social capital of Jean Vanier, which in particular gave him great ease in his relations with the public authorities.

In the months, the years, the decades that followed, we observed the many attitudes and declarations attesting to the existence among the members of the group of a culture of concealment and lies. T. Philippe seemed to excel at it naturally. J. Vanier still gave notorious proof of this even in his denials after 2014 of any knowledge of the facts alleged against his master. This culture of secrecy and lies also explains the truncated and recomposed accounts of the history of L'Eau Vive and the founding of L'Arche.

Faced with this attitude of strengthening the cohesion of the group and of almost permanent recidivism, it seems obvious that the Holy Office did not have the necessary means to fight, on the human and legal level, in the long term. One can also wonder what justice was likely to have them. Civil justice does not prevent recidivism either. The lay people, men and women, whose role we have assessed throughout this report, escaped canonical justice in this case. To fight against such a group would have required considering *a priori* each member of the "sect," identified or only suspected in 1956, as a liar for life. Foiling their long-term stratagems seems more like a counterintelligence service than a dicastery of the Roman curia.

We also note that the isolation measure concerning T. Philippe was difficult to maintain in the long term. Monks and clergy are not prison guards or psychiatric nurses. After a decade of isolation, T. Philippe argued that, for the sake of his mental health, he could not remain in this situation indefinitely. The moment of conciliar liberation – "opening,"

unbalanced practice of “mercy,” disrepute for canon law – sealed his return. In 1963, as in 1956, he also raised the argument of a request for a return to the lay order. With hindsight, one might think that this solution would have been the best. It would have publicly manifested the shortcomings of T. Philippe as a priest, would have reduced his aura of holiness (but this is not certain) or at least would have prevented him from basing it on his priestly legitimacy. Be that as it may, the ecclesial culture of the time made the Holy Office refuse to do so in 1956 as in 1963.

Would civil justice have been more effective? This is uncertain. It does not enter in the assignment of the Commission to pronounce itself on the legal qualification of facts and on the possible liabilities incurred in the eyes of the evolution of criminal laws during the period where these facts were committed. Reports to civil justice is not mentioned in any of the sources we consulted, either by the victims who seem, for some, to be satisfied with a treatment of the facts according to canon law, or by the ecclesial leaders in charge of the case. Thereafter, civil justice was seized only once in 2013 about G. Adam, the proceedings leading to a classification, for lack of evidence. The analyses developed in part 4 shed light on a framework favourable to keeping victims silent, and showed that cases of private confidences, before 2014, had neither been heard nor received. It was only after 2014 that a collective process of abandonment allowed a gradual liberation of speech.

After 1964, we must also observe that the fragilities and complexities of ecclesial governance (local community/diocese/Rome) also explain the ease with which T. Philippe regained public influence, with the support of J. Vanier and the women of L’Eau vive. From his return to France, he was no longer under the direct gaze of the Holy Office, which after 1965 took the name of Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The insufficiencies of communication between the various authorities and the hierarchical levels of the Church are also manifest. The post-conciliar strengthening of episcopal power helped the legal handling of the case. T. Philippe and J. Vanier know how to play perfectly well with these various tensions within the Church. The seriousness of the facts of the 1950s was

transmitted only with delay¹ to the Bishop of Beauvais, who does not hesitate – as we have seen – to oppose Rome on the treatment of T. Philippe and J. Vanier. The attitude of Dominican superiors is the subject of the work of the historical commission set up by the Province of France. Let us simply indicate that from his return to France, T. Philippe benefited from the sympathy of successive provincials, who allowed themselves to be taken in by the image of the “repentant penitent” and had esteem for his work with the “poor and disabled.” By means of an unbalanced practice of “mercy”, which is likely in certain cases to be likened to blindness or credulity, the analyses conceal the legal and psychiatric issues of the case, and like Fr. Congar, one then becomes sensitive, so to speak, to the “victims” of the harsh sanctions of the Holy Office².

Time also played out in favour of T. Philippe. He was aware of it and knew how to play it by arming himself with patience. This is what helped the group of initiates to hold on between 1956 and 1964. They also benefited from the change of generation within the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as well as the Dominican province of France. In 1973, Paul Philippe, having been created cardinal, left the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. After him, the dicastery gradually lost memory of the risks represented by T. Philippe and the Elders of L’Eau Vive. This is demonstrated by the elements presented concerning J. Vanier’s last request for ordination in 1975 (chapter 3). The memory of the L’Eau Vive affair was fading. A limited number of people still knew it, incompletely.

1. See on this point the letter from Mgr Desmazières to Fr. Rettenbach provincial of the Dominicans of France of August 10, 1970: “a suspension of the confessions of men and women from the Holy Office” (which I was totally unaware of) and that this same Father had been “rehabilitated to the confession of men, May 8, 1968” (which I did not know equally). Father Th. Philippe had received from me all the powers to confess [men and women]. . . and I believe that he used them. ”, III M 815, ADPF.

2. A letter from Fr. Yves-Marie Congar, dated 25 July, 1979, offers a good example. It is sent, together with letters from J. Vanier and Bishop Desmazières, to support a request for rehabilitation of T. Philippe. We deliver here the content in extenso: “Father Thomas Philippe has been harshly punished for a quarter of a century. He led a life dedicated to charity and spiritual help in the community for the handicapped founded by Jean Vanier. I believe that the mercy of the pastors of the Church should match that of God and that which the Father [*illegible word*]. He has sufficiently shown the marks of an authentic evangelical penance. Fr. Yves M.-J. Congar,” III M 815, ADPF.

This loss of memory leads us to mention another structural limit of the position of the Church: the secrecy which legally surrounds the matters of morals dealt with by the Holy Office. If it can, in certain cases, be justified by reasons whose validity we do not intend to discuss here, we must emphasize that the non-disclosure of the exact causes of T. Philippe's conviction is precisely what helped maintain his reputation for holiness and rewrite history as he saw fit. Faced with his duplicity and the culture of secrecy, with which he and his insiders have surrounded themselves, it has now become clear that bringing the facts to light is an essential condition for putting an end to it.

The rapid development of L'Arche and, consequently, of the notoriety of J. Vanier, constitutes a last essential explanatory factor of the longevity of the group. The reputation for holiness that surrounds J. Vanier – adding to that of T. Philippe –, his “gift of speech”, his “charisma” (chapter 12), his spiritual writings (part 7) allow the group of insiders” to benefit from the legitimacy of a new organization to perpetuate in its shadow its beliefs and practices (see part 4).

This last element leads to a crucial question: was L'Arche founded to serve as a screen for the activities of the group of “initiates”? The term “screen” is borrowed from the lexicon of T. Philippe, who used it in connection with the university career towards which he pushed J. Vanier¹. Contrary to what is said about the founding of L'Arche, there is no “revelation”, no cry heard, no vocational call defining the founding moment. The primary intention, which from December 1963, pushed J. Vanier and the former members of L'Eau Vive to plan to settle in Trosly-Breuil, was to gather around T. Philippe, whose “liberation” they had been waiting for ever since 1956 and for which they had put their plans for the future on hold. The “mystical-sexual” beliefs they received from him are the cement that unites them and pushed them to rebuild a work. This work was originally only necessary to create an official support, a “screen”, for their reunion. The choice to turn to people with disabilities appears in this perspective as an opportunity arising from the situation proposed by Dr. Préaut to T. Philippe.

1. Letter from T. Philippe to J. Vanier, end of July 1958, APJV: “We must not be afraid to use it vis-à-vis men, as a screen that hides the hidden and solitary life; in our current world, perhaps a screen of this kind is always required.”

If this intention is primary, we find that it coexists from the start with a sincere intention to devote oneself to people with disabilities. The two intentions, without contradicting each other, are, for the group, in coherence. The opportunity offered to them may even seem “providential” to them. We have emphasized on several occasions throughout this report that from 1952, T. Philippe developed, in reaction to the condemnations of his excesses by the theologians around him, an anti-intellectualism that went hand in hand with a growing valorisation of spiritual poverty, humility and “utter smallness”. The orientation of the “small ones” towards the “poor par excellence”¹, who would be preserved from intellectual pride by their deficient reasoning, perfectly prolongs this spiritual dynamic.

However, this spirituality of the “small ones” is, in many ways, fantastical. It was lived in a closed circle whose members have, since 1956, led a life marked by alternating periods of solitude and clandestine encounters (chapter 7). The foundation of L'Arche inaugurates for them a new sequence, that of daily life together. By welcoming, from August 1964, people with a mental handicap, they are confronted with a radically new otherness: that of these people, whose accompaniment quickly acquires professional skills. That also of the public authorities which finance their reception, and which thereby impose legal frameworks and exercise a right of control, in France as in most of the other countries where L'Arche communities are established.

The elements of the founding story must be placed in the context of this confrontation. J. Vanier says he heard, like a call, “the primal cry of people with disabilities”². His commitment to the development of L'Arche, his deep attachment to people with disabilities make it obvious. Coming first to join T. Philippe, he enters, with the foundation of L'Arche, in an unexpected dynamic, and embarks on a path whose fruitfulness he did not expect.

This observation leads us to a final series of questions, concerning on the one hand the unshakeable loyalty of J. Vanier to T. Philippe and his beliefs, and on the other hand the impact of this original sectarian

1. Letter from T. Philippe to Fr. Rettenbach, 27 December, 1967, III M 815, ADPF.
2. Spink, *op cit.*, p 68. As an example of these founding stories see K. Spink, p. 63-93; and A.-S. Constant, *op. cit.*, p. 99-133.

core on the whole of L'Arche. How to understand the persistence of J. Vanier's attachment to T. Philippe and his "mystical-sexual" beliefs and practices? The question arises all the more acutely as, according to the words of J. Vanier himself and according to multiple accounts¹, the development of L'Arche was the source of strong tensions with his spiritual father. A.-S. Constant reports, for example, the following confidence from J. Vanier, during an interview in 2013: "My relationship with Father Thomas was the greatest joy of my life and also my greatest ordeal"². The words testify to an evolution of the relationship between the two men which J. Vanier explains as follows:

"He expected me to always be the obedient. Obeying isn't quite the right word for that matter, it's not really a question of obedience, but of attitude perhaps, the attitude of the son who follows his father, and I saw that I had to take my responsibilities, to open the way. It was a great pain³."

In another interview, in 2009, Jean Vanier talks about the founding of L'Arche and the significance of his link to T. Philippe:

J.V. with Father Thomas, it's obvious that... finally the bond was stronger than the freedom that I could leave him. Because it was my life with God, my intellectual life, finally everything... so my deep person was linked. So, I couldn't not stay with him without denying my own history. Yes. I think there is an identity problem. And I think I had to find out who I am, even if I didn't follow Father Thomas when he wanted something else, when he didn't accept ecumenism....

A.M.: That you discover who you are, but by his side?

J.V.: I had to become myself and not just Father Thomas' son.

A. M.: And that's why you needed to live with him in fact.

Jean Vanier: Yes, I think so. Because if I hadn't lived with him, I couldn't have opposed him. Living with him, I was both united and... the word "opposite" is too strong... but to do things that I felt I had to do⁴.

This passage is a source of profound astonishment. J. Vanier indeed presents his link with Thomas Philippe in a paradoxical and contradictory

1. See in particular Spink, *op. cit.*, p. 90-93 and Constant, *op. cit.* p. 124-127.

2. A.-S. Constant, *op. cit.* p. 124

3. *Ibid.*, p. 126

4. Interview with Jean Vanier, January 2009.

way. Why stay with someone you want to break free from? He expresses the desire to stand out and emancipate, but without really opposing? Why couldn't he completely leave his "father" to build himself true independence?

Our report indeed attests that this "emancipation" is incomplete. J. Vanier continues to reproduce with many women the mystical-sexual relations such as T. Philippe conceived them. At the same time, the meticulous analysis of the works of J. Vanier in part 7 tends to show the presence of strong continuities with T. Philippe. How is this to be understood? The psychoanalytical approach highlights that, faced with his mother's insecurity and chronic depression, "her body, her sensations, her affects, everything had remained fallow and found a way out, relieving guilt in the theory of T. Philippe." The psychiatric approach emphasizes that, for T. Philippe, J. Vanier "represented an ideal prey because of his unstructured personality, his immaturity, his difficulty in knowing how to direct his life, the extreme religiosity in which he had constantly lived, of the excellent reputation which the Dominican enjoyed with Pauline and Georges Vanier", and finally underlines that "the intellectual and sexual formation of J. Vanier rests almost exclusively on T. Philippe".

Both approaches draw attention to what is at stake in the L'Eau Vive period, which for J. Vanier serves as a moment of initiation, of discovery, in a great confusion of the sexual, the emotional and the spiritual. T. Philippe's beliefs and influence suddenly give him access to a world. The experience lived during this period comes to constitute in his eyes, the intimate base, the guiding axis of his life.

Finally, one can think that the inability to read this experience critically also comes from the radical nature of the choices made between 1952 and 1956. J. Vanier abandoned the possibility of following his own path in order to remain faithful to that of T. Philippe, facing for this a strong adversity. Each reaffirmation of this choice makes it more difficult to go back, especially since after 1964, the success of L'Arche may have appeared to him as a providential confirmation of his choices and his sacrifices.

The obvious contradiction between this maintained link and the tensions that are developing about the L'Arche, echoes another contradiction: why did L'Arche, initiated by a sectarian group, not become a sect?

Indeed, part 3 of this work shows that if the institutionalization of charismatic authority, or the personalization and autonomy of power in communities, could constitute a breeding ground favourable to the development of configurations of control and the perpetration of facts of abuse, L'Arche as a project and as an organization has nothing to do with a sect. Part 4 showed that while the original sectarian nucleus did indeed form a microsystem at the heart of L'Arche, in light of the facts of abuse identified by the commission, it did not seem to have developed beyond the parent house of Trosly-Breuil. The home of La Ferme, place of T. Philippe in the 1970s and 1980s, was its epicentre. In some ways, it extended, in these decades, the community of L'Eau Vive. T. Philippe committed many abuses there and seems to have trained, to our knowledge, at least one disciple, Father G. Adam.

However, the results of the investigation call for vigilance. La Ferme does not have a monopoly on the acts of control and abuse entrusted to the commission. The facts involving J. Vanier also took place elsewhere, in other countries and in other communities. As far as we know, none of the people he "initiated" (abused) went on to repeat these practices. The perception they had of the pseudo-theological substratum proposed by J. Vanier as a justification for his sexual acts was moreover often tenuous, perhaps due to its enormity or more simply to a lack of explanation. In addition, Chapter 12 showed that configurations of hold, "in imitation of J. Vanier", may have existed elsewhere in L'Arche.

This limited development of the sectarian nucleus is astonishing, especially if we compare it to the multiple abuses that developed among the brothers of Saint-Jean founded by M.-D. Philippe. There, the system of abuse seems to have been confused for several decades with the main bodies of government. What protected L'Arche from such a diffusion phenomenon?

The information relating to the foundation show that if the sectarian core is at the origin of the birth of L'Arche, its members then exercise a variable influence. Decisive for J. Vanier and T. Philippe, secondary, but important for Jacqueline d'Halluin, strictly limited to Trosly-Breuil for Jeanne Riandey or Gerry McDonald. This nucleus, numerically small, was quickly joined and overtaken by the arrival of a large number of people who were completely foreign to it and who, in turn, assumed the

foundation project with different intuitions and values. At the request of J. Vanier, institutional actors intervene immediately in the foundation enterprise—medico-social institutions, public donors, etc. The partnerships impose on L'Arche a legal, medico-social, administrative and economic framework and constraints that are constantly evolving. There are many obstacles there, to an expansion of the sectarian phenomenon.

We should also emphasize that, despite its shortcomings and faults, the vigilance exercised by Rome, and in this case by Cardinal Paul Philippe, prevented the realization of a scenario which would have steered L'Arche in a completely different direction by refusing to ordain J. Vanier as a priest in 1977. In 1975, he decided to leave all leadership functions, with a view to becoming a priest and, he wrote to "assist" T. Philippe and "to be at the service of other communities of L'Arche". Because, explained J. Vanier, "for 1 or 2 years, my primary work has been to see the assistants and help them find their place in L'Arche or elsewhere and to commit themselves to Jesus"¹. One may wonder what would have become of L'Arche in such a configuration. It is probably this refusal that pushed J. Vanier to go in a different direction from the one desired by T. Philippe.:

"The difficulty is that Father Thomas, I'm going to say something that seems odd, does not have great interest in L'Arche. His interest is to bring people to God. That was the guideline. For me, I can't say that my interest was to bring people to Jesus, I was happy with that, it was to bring people, to make an institution work."

Unexpectedly, the statement, taken from the 2009 interview, is the exact opposite of the project envisaged in 1975. This may indicate that J. Vanier seems to have ultimately favoured the growth and institutional solidity of L'Arche, over the "mystical" and disordered dynamics of T. Philippe.

These multiple brakes finally explain the observation of the apparent exhaustion of this sectarian nucleus in L'Arche. J. Vanier and T. Philippe are dead. Their influence has waned considerably. G. Adam and the small group of those who are suspected of still adhering to the mystical-sexual beliefs of T. Philippe, have a weak capacity for influence.

1. J. Vanier's report on his role at L'Arche addressed to Bishop Desmazières, 18 January, 1975, ACDF.

The beginning of the last known abusive relationships of the commission dates back to the mid-2000s: this can be interpreted as a sign of an exhaustion of the capacity for renewal of the sectarian core. We must remain cautious here, because we know how slow the process of speaking out for victims is. This may mask more recent testimonies or certain sectors of the expansion of the sectarian core. However, the elements indicated seem to us to be strong signals.

We also see a process of individual and collective awareness developing in L'Arche since 2014, as well as in the various institutions concerned by these facts (Saint John, the Dominican Order, the Carmels). The resolution of the international leaders of L'Arche to request a multidisciplinary commission to study these facts is a final sign that reflects the progress of this process of collective de-hold. The commission worked with the desire to establish the facts and try to understand the mechanisms at work, but also with the conviction that their exposure in full light is the essential condition for their extinction.

SOURCES AND APPENDIX

Inventory of archives

The historical parts of the report are based on a set of archival collections available in Canada (I), Rome (II) and France (III).

The Commission would like to sincerely thank all the institutions that have authorized the consultation of the documents, so that the historical truth can be approached and manifested.

I. Archives in Canada

A. CANADIAN PUBLIC ARCHIVES

1. Library and Archives Canada – Bibliothèque et Archives Canada (LAC - BAC, Ottawa)

Georges Philias Vanier Collection (MG32A2). There is a digital finding aid for this collection, produced by Lucie Paquet (102 p., finding aid no. 884). The Georges P. Vanier Collection consists of 18.64 linear meters and includes a total of 114 volumes. The documents were donated in 1993 to the National Archives of Canada by Thérèse Vanier on behalf of her brothers and on her own behalf. The Study Commission had unrestricted access to all the records of the fund. A description can be found on the link below: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/CollectionSearch/Pages/record.aspx?app=FonAndCol&IdNumber=99083> The complete inventory of the fund is available at the following address: <http://data2.archives.ca/pdf/pdf001/p000000135.pdf>

B. PRIVATE CANADIAN ARCHIVES

2. Archives of the Archdiocese of Québec

J. Vanier Collection: letters from J. Vanier, Georges Vanier, Father Lallement, Cardinal Pizzardo to Bishop Roy; Bishop Roy's responses, exchanges with the Holy Office (February 1952-July 1956).

3. Centre J. Vanier Archives (King's College, London, Ontario)

Mrs Pamela Cushing sent to the Study Commission the exhaustive archives of the « Centre J. Vanier »: correspondence, work files, manuscripts, recordings, etc. These considerable materials were consulted and in part used by the Commission.

4. Archives of Catherine de Hueck Doherty (Madonna House, Combermere, Ontario)

Correspondence of Catherine Doherty with J. Vanier: photographs, letters (1970-1974)

II. Archives in Rome

5. General Archives of The Dominican Order (AGOP), Sainte-Sabine, Rome

Collection XIII – 30 200/2. “Provincia Franciae. 1938-1946.” This documentary set is composite:

“Mission of T. Philippe at Le Saulchoir. 1942-1943.” Correspondence.

“Documents regarding “Le Saulchoir” provided by Fr. De Couesnongle on his departure.”

“L’Eau vive” (1947-1954).

“Varia. File No. 11”, with a letter from M.-D. Philippe, 1952.

“Report on L’Eau vive and the events regarding L’Eau vive since the month of April 1952”, 79 p. [Defence report, written by supporters of L’Eau vive].

Collection XIII – 31 402. Two files bear the same symbol and relate to the two Philippe brothers. The first file (“Provincia Franciae. Th. Philippe”) is also referenced with its protocol number of the Holy Office: 214/52. It contains a set of documents compiled by the prosecutor of the Dominican Order between 1952 to 1979.

The second file (« Provincia Franciae. M.-D. Philippe ») actually contains two distinct sets of documents: 1/ the documents relating to the trial, conviction and rehabilitation of M.-D. Philippe by the Holy Office (1955-1959); 2/ a series of correspondence regarding the resignation of M.-D. Philippe from his chair in Fribourg (1981), then his appointment as superior of the community of Saint-Jean (1981-1986).

6. Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Vatican City)

Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, Prot. No. 214/1952: The collection relating to T. Philippe, opened under protocol number “214” in 1952, contains all the archives of the former Holy Office regarding T. Philippe, from the trial “for false mysticism” (1952-1956) until 1981. Divided into 6 volumes, the file includes a total of 311 archival items. This collection brings together the documents relating to J. Vanier, who has no archival collection of his own opened in his name. In May 2021, 62 documents regarding J. Vanier were disclosed, in whole or in part, to the Study Commission. The Commission had access, in December 2021, to a very precise archival report from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This 68-page document (“Relazione d’Archivio”) covers the whole of file 214/1952. We find certain originals and certain copies of the documents of the Holy Office, communicated or not by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to the AGOP, to the ADPF, in the personal archives of J. Vanier, and in certain diocesan archives.

Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, Prot. N. 513/1955: This is the collection relating to Marie-Dominique Philippe. Opened in 1955, the file contains the legal documents which led to the conviction of M.-D. Philippe (1957) and the lifting of sanctions (1959). The file consulted covers the period 1955-1959 and includes 53 archival elements. In December 2021, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith transmitted a very precise 16-page archival report (“Relazione d’Archivio”) on the whole file 513/1955.

III. Archives in France

NOTA BENE. ARCHIVES OF THE STUDY COMMISSION (2020-2022):

The Study Commission received on deposit, most often in digital format, a set of documents, correspondence, reports, etc. from people close to J. Vanier and L’Arche. The Commission would like to thank all those who have thus expressed their confidence in the work undertaken. The Commission also wishes to point out that at the end of its work this

documentary collection will be entrusted, for the purposes, not of consultation, but of conservation, to an archive location which will be defined by L'Arche international, so that if necessary, the documents that serve as evidence for the main conclusions of this report can be produced.

A. INSTITUTIONS OF PUBLIC ARCHIVES

7. Oise Departmental archives (Beauvais)

a. "L'Arche à Trosly" collection (1959-2008): a digital inventory of this collection is available at the Oise Departmental Archives (120 J, August 2017, 29 p.; 3.1 linear meters, 31 boxes).

n. Collection of "L'Arche internationale" (1968-2008): collection 121 J, digital inventory, August 67 p.; 11.9 linear metres, 119 boxes.

NB: these are two private archive collections, collected between 2016 and 2017 and deposited in the Oise Departmental Archives

8. Strasbourg National and University Library (BNUS)

« Jacques Maritain » Collections: Correspondence Jean Marx-Jacques Maritain (1912-1972); Correspondence Jean de Menasce (o.p.) - Jacques Maritain (1926-1966); Correspondence Willard Hill-Jacques Maritain (1930-1959); Correspondence Élisabeth de Miribel-Jacques Maritain (1942-1970); Correspondence T. Philippe-Jacques Maritain (1947-1951); Correspondence J. Vanier-Jacques Maritain (1952); Documents file (Draft stature and substantive reflection) relating to L'Eau vive; Personal notebooks of Jacques Maritain (in the process of being edited for those connected to L'Eau vive).

B. INSTITUTIONS OF PRIVATE ARCHIVES

9. Archives of L'Arche international

Journal of «crisis management» (2014-2019). Emails, minutes of interviews, various documentation relating to the management of situations of hold and sexual abuse in L'Arche.

Personal archives of J. Vanier (APJV, Trosly and Paris).

So-called "Not For All" (NFA) archives: photographs, handwritten notes by J. Vanier, letters from T. Philippe to J. Vanier (1952-1964); correspondence with Jacqueline d'Halluin, Anne de Rosambo, Marie-Dominique Philippe, Carmelite nuns, etc.

11 passports of J. Vanier.

5 address books of J. Vanier.

Personal diaries of J. Vanier from the founding of L'Arche to his death: 1965 – 2019, excluding the years 1977, 1996 and 2018. Documents and personal correspondence inserted in a certain number of diaries.

One of J. Vanier's Bibles. Jerusalem Bible translation, 1956 edition. Badly damaged, it was stored on a shelf in J. Vanier's office and no longer seemed to be in common use. Probably the Bible he used in the decade before the founding of L'Arche and the one after. It is full of many letters and notes.

3 files probably from Xavier Le Pichon, kept on a shelf in a space reserved for T. Philippe and L'Eau vive:

- Hélène Claeys-Bouuaert, "General Correspondence; 1908-1910 (to Father Dehau); 1932-1950 (to T. Philippe), 192 pages. This is the transcription of the originals held by Xavier Le Pichon.
- Xavier Le Pichon, "The hidden life of Father Thomas at the source of his apostolate with the poor and the little ones. Preliminary text not to be distributed without my authorisation", La Pène – August 2011, 43 p.
- Xavier Le Pichon, «Life of Father Thomas», text written for courses at the Thomas Philippe Institute and «stopped in August 1993 at the request of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe who did not want a life of Father Thomas, his brother, to be written», 23 p., incomplete.

1 file «G. P. V. Archives ». File relating to the management of the Georges P. Vanier Collections, deposited at the Library and Archives of Canada (LAC).

1 file, "Jock, Archives as possible relations to "CAUSE" on future biography. 13/8/12". File of documents relating to the cause for the beatification of Georges and Pauline Vanier.

"Personal archives": approximately 0.3 linear meter. Mainly handwritten documents by J. Vanier, which J. Vanier recovered from the collection deposited by his family at LAC in Ottawa: several hundred letters from J. Vanier to his parents, diaries, 4 notebooks, 9 files, 2 bound copies of his thesis.

- File: letters from J. Vanier to his parents, 1934-1939.
- File: letters from J. Vanier to his parents, 1945-1947
- File: letters from J. Vanier to his parents, 1954-1958
- File: letters from J. Vanier to his parents, 1956-1966
- File: letters from J. Vanier to his parents, after 1966
- A cardboard folder containing a bulletin from the 1944 cadet school and several bundles of philosophy class notes, including at least one by T. Philippe.
- File: 5 bundles, seeming to correspond to 5 texts written by J. Vanier. 4 are typescripts and a manuscript: «Ecstasy», «Beauty under the angle of Love», «Beauty and Love», «Christian witness in the Gospel and the modern world», untitled poem.
- File: a typescript by J. Vanier of a philosophical study, “The Aristotelian universe and its metaphysical tendency”. This is a work of J. Vanier when he was a student.
- File “Letters/Reports; J. Vanier – Bishopric of Beauvais, 1975-1978, Confidential”. Correspondence and documents relating to J. Vanier’s last request for the priesthood: exchanges with the CDF, letters between J. Vanier and Bishop Desmazières, as well as a long letter from M.-D. Philippe giving his opinion on the refusal of the CDF.
- Journal 1940.
- Journal 1941.
- Journal 1942.
- Journal for the use of Midshipmen, 1946-1947.
- 2 small bundles of typewritten texts: notes taken during military navigations.
- 1 typewritten text: “A few notes for reading Saint John”
- J. Vanier’s working Files:
- File “Authority” containing notes from J. Vanier dating from 2011, 2013, but also photocopied or typed documents from l’École de Vie (1993), Faith and Light Formation (2010), document written for Joe Egan and Hollee in 2012, several speeches on authority.
- File “Directors’ Retreat”, with notes by Jean Vanier.
- Library of J. Vanier. Old books, no doubt family –Shakespeare; spirituality books, etc. – most of the library: Christian spirituality,

but also on Islam and Buddhism; Bibles; works by T. Philippe; books by Marie-Dominique Philippe; copies of his thesis.

J. Vanier’s work files following the revelations regarding T. Philippe (2014-2018).

10. Archives of L’Arche in Trosly

Jean de La Selle communicated to the Study Commission a documentary collection gathered over several decades: a cardboard folder with documents relating to Jacqueline d’Halluin; a box of archives relating to La Ferme from a former administrator of the association “Les Chemins de L’Arche”.

The Study Commission also received about fifteen files (0.5 linear meter) containing documents relating to the administration of the community in Trosly, as well as various minutes of reflection meetings and assemblies. One of these files is devoted to the material management of the death and the succession of T. Philippe. It contains, among other things, two documents, one entitled “Inventory of papers at Jacqueline d’Halluin’s home” and the other bearing the title “Inventory of recorded cassettes of Father Thomas at La Ferme”.

11. Dominican Archives of the Province of France (ADPF, Paris)

The archives of the Dominican province of France are divided into «sections», which are themselves divided into «series». Two sections are particularly relevant to the Study Commission: Section III (Provincial Administration), and Section V (Personal Archives of the Friars). T. Philippe’s administrative file includes correspondence relating to his situation and the sanctions affecting him. Just over 250 documents are kept there, in six sub-folders, each covering a decade, from the 1940s to the 2000s (the 1980s and 1990s are grouped into a single “1990s” sub-folder). Essentially, it is correspondence between T. Philippe, the successive priors of the province of France, the General Curia, the Holy Office then the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Mgr Lacointe and Mgr Desmazières, bishops de Beauvais, and to a lesser extent a few relatives of TP, such as Dr Robert Préaut and Dr John Thompson, J. Vanier or Marie-Dominique Philippe.

- Section III: Provincial Administration
 - III, series I, 4 “Register of the Provincial Council of the Dominican Province of France”, sessions from 31 October 1933 to 6 July 1958
 - Section III, series C: Master of the Order
 - III, C, 17: “Michael Brown”
 - File B: « General Curia – Correspondence » (1955-1957)
 - Section III, Series M: Monks/Clerics
 - III, M, 815: T. Philippe
 - III, Series M, 96: Marie-Dominique Philippe
 - File 1
 - File 2
 - File “Official Correspondence”
 - Section III, Series O: Preaching – Ministries – Apostolate
 - III, O, 59: “L’Eau vive” (1945-1959)
 - III, O, 59-1: “L’œuvre” [NdT : The Work]
 - File: “Foundation and ascension (1945-1952)”:
 - The first ‘Eau Vive’. Major documents, 1945-1951 (manifestos, advertisements and other presentation documents [1945-1955]).
 - The first ‘Eau Vive’, correspondence (1946-1951)
 - File: “Crisis and decline (1952-1955)
 - Provincial trustee file. Pensions of the province to several hosts of L’Eau vive (1951-1954)
 - Projects and reports
 - Correspondence
 - File: “Liquidation of the work by the P. Kopf (1957-1959)”
 - Superiorship of P. Kopf (1957-1959). Correspondence from 28 June 1957 to 02 May 1959.
 - Major documents
 - Miscellaneous
- III, Series O, 59-2: “Eau vive, The Case”
 - File “Testimonies”:
 - Report No. 1 of Madeleine Guérault
 - Report No. 2 of Madeleine Brunet
 - 24 letters of Madeleine Guérault

- Other letters
- Annexed documents
- File: correspondence with the Holy-Office:
- Official documents (1956)
- Official reports (1956)
- Major correspondence (1956)
- Minor correspondence (1956)
- Monography
 - File “Supporting report of the lay leaders of L’Eau vive”
 - Miscellaneous files
- Section V: Personal archives of the friars
 - Section V, 5: “Thomas Deman”: personal diary of Father Deman, years 1933 and 1936
 - Section V, 626: « Jean de Menasce »: file of correspondence with Fathers Marie-Dominique Philippe (1940), T. Philippe (1937-1940), Paul Philippe
 - Section V, 815: “T. Philippe”
 - Box N° 1: “Project regarding a French Catholic home near Le Saulchoir”; «The Conduct of the World and Predestination», n. d.; “Sermon for Perpetual Profession”, n. d.; “The Holy Family and the Rosary”, n. d.; “In the school of the Holy Spirit. Foreword”; “Place and importance of preaching in the apostolate of the Church”; “Marian Theology”; “The Treasures of the Immaculate Heart of Mary”; «The Assumption»; “The Sufferings of Mary. I. The Mystery of Mary’s Sorrows”; “Predestination. Mystery of divine predilection”; «1941 Retreat»; «Marian Theology», 1946; «Incomparable resources of divine motherhood», 3 copies including one dated 1948; “The Pentecost Prayer”, lecture given at L’Eau vive, May 1950; “Pride and humility in the history of Salvation”, lecture given at L’Eau vive, summer 1950.
 - Box N° 2: “Mary, divine remedy for the errors of our time”; Philosophy. Psychology course. 1936-1937; Metaphysics course; Logic. 2nd edition, 1935; Psychology courses.
 - Box N° 3: Lectures given at the Monastery of the Cross: “The contemplative life or the spirit of the Order of Saint Dominic”,

1935; “The interpenetration of the mysteries of life and death in Christ Jesus and in his members”; List of writings and cassettes by T. Philippe on sale at L’Arche; “Nine Marian Conferences”; «The Immaculate Conception».

Box 4: Two retreats; Lecture given in Lille: “Christ our conso-ler”, 1934; Retreats preached to the Dominicans of Les Tourelles for the Holy Year, 1950; “Saint Thomas Aquinas”; Ordination image of Fr. Vercoistre; Sermon given at Le Saulchoir of Kain: “Saint Dominic or the mystery of the Holy Preaching”, August 4, 1933; Text in collaboration with Fr. Maydieu: “The Dominican consecrated to the Word. The friend of the object”, 1929; “The Silence of the Blessed Virgin” 1944; Sermon at the Monastery of the Cross in Soisy-sur-Seine: “Paschal Triduum for the Feast of the Compassion of the Most Blessed Virgin, 1942”.

Section V, « Francis Marneffe » (in the process of being filed)

File : “Père T. Philippe”

- Section VI : Series Q, 2: “Monasteries “

VI, Q, 2 : “Étiolles, monastère de la Croix et de la Compassion [NdT: Monastery of the Cross and Compassion] » :

2 boxes comprising 10 correspondence files of Fr. Antonin Motte (1942-1957) and a file relating to the later period when the monastery moved to Évry.

VI, Q, 2: “Bouvines, Monastère du Cœur Immaculé de Marie” [NdT: Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary]

12. *Archives of the Nogent-sur-Marne Carmelites*

File relating to the canonical inquiry conducted by Fr. Marie-Eugène in 1951 (1951-1956): notes on the speech given by Fr. Marie-Eugène at the Capitulants, March 10, 1951; last recommendations of Mother Thérèse of Jesus on her departure from the Carmel of Nogent, March 14, 1951; acts of transfer of the said nun to other Carmels; various testimonies; notes on the speech of Fr. Provincial o.c.d., Fr. André de la Croix, dated October 20, 1956, “day of the feast of “Mater Admirabilis”, on the situation of the Carmel of Nogent and the departure of two sisters

(Sister Marie of the Eucharist; Sister Marie-Madeleine of the Sacred Heart).

13. *Archives of the Paris Catholic Institute (ICP)*

Canon Daniel-Joseph Lallement collection. There are two archival sets relating to Canon Lallement, which are both related and distinct:

- “Canon Daniel-Joseph Lallement” collection. 47 NA”, inventory published in 2017, 28 pages: correspondence, notes.
- File on J. Vanier’s thesis defence (1953-1962): P.5.9.1. This file contains the typescript of the thesis of J. Vanier, the thesis drafts (“Plan and notes on the thesis”, 1959); reports for the defence, draft reports; the speeches of J. Vanier and Abbé Lallement on the day of the defence. Correspondence: there are about 42 letters (J. Vanier-Lallement; Lallement-General Vanier; Lallement-various interlocutors of Eau vive; Lallement-Mgr Roy; Lallement-various interlocutors of the Catholic Institute of Paris); grey literature around L’Eau vive: statutes of L’Eau vive, retreats and conferences for 1955; program for 1956. Curriculum vitae of J. Vanier; marks out of 20 on exams (1955).

14. *Archives of the Beauvais diocese*

The Study Commission would like to point out that the archives of the diocese of Beauvais should have contained all the documents from the correspondence of Bishop Stéphane Desmazières with the Holy See relating to the cases of T. Philippe and J. Vanier; in practice, however, the diocesan archives have been purged of any document regarding the two men: the letters from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Secretariat of State, which we know to be numerous, thanks to the archives of the Holy Siege, were probably, *contra legem*, carried away or destroyed. The archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, however, make it possible to know the position of the bishop, who protects and supports as much as he can T. Philippe in his requests for rehabilitation and J. Vanier in his desire to be ordained.

15. *Archives of the Meaux diocese (ADM)*

Collection of the “Little Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary” of Thomery (“76 W” collection): there is a detailed digital directory of this collection, entitled “The pious union of the Little Sisters of the Blessed Virgin”, compiled in July 2020 by Maurine Candat, under the direction of Marie-Laure Gordien, 62 pages. We find in this collection working documents of Canon Lallement (correspondence, draft, 76W29); drafts of J. Vanier’s thesis, and in particular all the final pages of comparison between Aristotelian, Jewish and Christian morality, which do not appear in the defended thesis; draft articles by J. Vanier; lectures by T. Philippe; a hundred letters exchanged between mother Marguerite-Marie and J. Vanier, alias “Little John” (1950s-1980s, 76W42 and 76W44); correspondence of Pauline Vanier (Canon Lallement, mother Marguerite-Marie).

16. *Archives of the Rennes Archdiocese*

File relating to the investigation conducted by Fr. Paul-Dominique Marcovits (June 2014 – August 2015). In June 2014, Cardinal Philippe Barbarin received testimonies about T. Philippe which he immediately transmitted to the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life, to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and to Bishop Pierre d’Ornellas, as an accompanying bishop of L’Arche International. The investigation was ordered on November 18, 2014 by Bishop Pierre d’Ornellas. It is entrusted to Fr. Paul-Dominique Marcovits who works for four months. Fr. Marcovits’ report is dated February 18, 2015; it was returned to the sponsor on February 20, 2015. However, testimonies arrive until August 2015. The Study Commission was able to consult the anonymized report of the investigation (19 pages), as well as some elements of correspondence and testimonies received.

17. *Archives of the Versailles diocese*

Collections 3, R, 5: “Eau Vive”:

- “Articles of association of L’Eau Vive” (associative), 1945.
- “The statutes of L’Eau Vive” (community functioning), 1949, accompanied by “Clarifications and additions to the Statutes of L’Eau vive”, 1954.

- “Inquiry ordered by His Excellency Monsignor Renard, Bishop of Versailles on “Eau vive” (February 1954)”, 5 May, 1954.
- Letter from Marguerite Tournoux to the Bishop of Versailles, n. d.

18. *Archives of the Congregation of Saint-Jean (ACSJ, Prieuré de Rimont)*

Personal documents of Marie-Dominique Philippe: Cours du Saulchoir, personal correspondence with members of her family, correspondence with close friends.

Courses, conferences, homilies and works of Marie-Dominique Philippe (1944-2006).

Correspondences with the bishops, with the Dominicans, with Cardinal Stanislas Dziwisz, with numerous monks and nuns

Archives of the foundation of the Priory of Attichy.

Archives of the foundation of the Priory of Cognac

Handwritten document by T. Philippe relating to L’Eau vive (1954).

Table of interviews

No.	Surname	Forename(s)	Date of meeting
1	SAINT-MACARY	Alain (1)	2020/10/17
2	[anonymous]	Brigitte	2020/10/27
3	MAROLLEAU	Émile (1)	2020/10/28
4	JACQUAND	Pierre	2020/11/24
5	DE LACHAPELLE	Philippe	2020/11/25
6	ALLIER	Hubert (1)	2020/12/10
7	ZAKRZEWSKA	Alina	2020/12/10
8	PESNEAU	Michèle-France (1)	2020/12/10
9	SAINT-MACARY	Alain (2)	2020/12/11
10	DE LA SELLE	Jean (1)	2020/12/11
11	MC PHERSON	Cecilia (1)	2020/12/16
12	POSNER	Stephan	2020/12/18
13	SAINT-MACARY	Alain (3)	2020/12/19
14	MC PHERSON	Cecilia (2)	2020/12/19

15	PESNEAU	Michèle-France (2)	2020/12/19
16	LE CARDINAL	Dominique & Gilles (1)	2020/12/29
17	MC GRIEVY	Christine (1)	2020/12/29
18	HOLLIS	Tim	2021/01/05
19	PESNEAU	Michèle-France (3)	2021/01/18
20	SACRÉ	Jacqueline	2021/01/18
21	PELOQUIN	Chris (1)	2021/01/18
22	LE VAN KHANH	Marie-Paule	2021/01/19
23	DALBET	Fabienne	2021/01/19
24	MC GRIEVY	Christine (2)	2021/01/20
25	HUMEAU	Agnès	2021/02/01
26	PELOQUIN	Chris (2)	2021/02/01
27	DE LA SELLE	Jean (2)	2021/02/02
28	FRANKO	Erol (1)	2021/02/02
29	DURNER	George	2021/02/03
30	ROUX	Brigitte	2021/02/03
31	VOLANT	Hugues	2021/02/03
32	PASCAL	Jean-Christophe (1)	2021/02/10
33	PASCAL	Jean-Christophe (2)	2021/02/24
34	FRANKO	Erol (2)	2021/02/12
35	WEBB	Gary	2021/02/17
36	MONTOYA	Nathalie & Bruno	2021/02/17
37	ARONIO	Maria (1)	2021/02/17
38	ARONIO	Maria (2)	2021/02/18
39	RENAULT	Francis	2021/02/17
40	BIEDRAWA	Maria	2021/02/18
41	LE CARDINAL	Dominique & Gilles (2)	2021/02/18
42	DE FREMONT	Jean-François	2021/02/19
43	OKECKI	Karol	2021/02/19
44	REYNAUD	Tricia & Michel-Marie (1)	2021/02/22
45	[anonyme]	Ivy	2021/02/24
46	OTTRUBAY	Veronika	2021/02/24
47	REYNAUD	Tricia & Michel-Marie (2)	2021/03/15
48	[anonyme]	Hélène (1)	2021/03/15
49	[anonyme]	Élodie (1)	2021/03/15
50	MAHEAS	Christian (1)	2021/0/09

51	[anonyme]	Hélène (2)	2021/04/07
52	[anonyme]	Eva	2021/04/01
53	[anonyme]	Élodie (2)	2021/05/04
54	LAROUCHE	Robert	2021/05/06
55	MAROLLEAU	Émile (2)	2021/05/07
56	[anonyme]	Brigitte (2)	2021/05/07
57	ALLIER	Hubert (2)	2021/05/10
58	MAROLLEAU	Émile (3)	2021/05/11
59	CHALOIN	Joëlle	2021/05/14
60	[anonyme]	Hélène (3)	2021/05/15
61	NOLAN	Ben	2021/05/18
62	MOSTELLER	Sue (1)	2021/05/31
63	[anonyme]	Homme religieux	2021/06/01
64	PASCAL & MC GRIEVY	Jean-Christophe & Christine	2021/06/01
65	VAGINAY	Denis	2021/06/16
66	LENNON	Jo	2021/06/01
67	EINSLE	Gabrielle	2021/06/02
68	MC GRIEVY	Christine (3)	2021/06/03
69	MOSTELLER	Sue (2)	2021/06/03
70	PETIT	Régine	2021/06/04
71	GRILLET	Claudine & Claude	2021/06/04
72	[anonyme]	Ivy (2)	2021/06/07-12
73	MAHEAS	Christian (2)	2021/05/28
74		Mère Marie-Reine	2021/06/16
75	EGAN	Joe (1)	2021/06/22
76	PASQUET	Jean-Eudes	2021/07/01
77	[anonyme]	Abby	2021/07/21
78	GLASS	Eileen (1)	2021/09/17
79	POIROT	Fr Bruno-Joseph	2021/09/21
80	SHEARER	Ann	2021/09/27
81	DE BARGUE	Anne	2021/10/02
82	PAOLI	Antoine	2021/10/04
83	[anonyme]	Femme resp. de comm.	2021/10/04
84	TOKAR	Nadine	2021/10/05
85	KERHUEL	Régine	2021/10/06

86	[anonyme]	Femme	2021/10/06
87	FONTAINE	Patrick	2021/10/11
88	PRUNIER	Marc	2021/10/12
89	GLASS	Eileen (2)	2021/10/20
90	FARQUHARSON	Judy	2021/11/02
91	NEWROTH	Ann & Steve	2021/11/02
92	[anonyme]	Amy	2021/11/03
93	GLENNON	Trish (1)	2021/11/03
94	GLENNON	Trish (2)	2021/11/04
95	EGAN	Joe (2)	2021/11/04
96	HALFERTY	Brian & Marylou	2021/11/04
97	MACMILLAN	Carl	2021/11/05
98	CLARKE	Bill	2021/11/06
99	PARISIO	Toinette	2021/11/08
100	HAWORTH	Marybee	2021/11/08
101	BAROODY	Kathy	2021/11/11
102	BANDUCCI	Lydia	2021/11/12
103	[anonyme]	Femme	2021/11/18
104	[anonyme]	Céline & Joseph	2021/12/01
105	HEDEE	Chantal	2021/12/07
106	DORMAL	Michèle	2021/12/29
107	D'ORNELLAS	Pierre	2022/01/05
108	DONALDSON	Karine	2022/01/12
109	DE LA SELLE	Jean (3)	2022/01/22
110	STROHMEYER	George	2022/01/24
111	[anonyme]	Francesca	2022/01/26
112	[anonyme]	Ivy	2022/02/14
113	POSNER	Stephan	2022/05/04
114	CATES-CARNEY	Stacy	2022/05/17
115	[anonyme]	Hélène	2022/05/28
116	[anonyme]	Brigitte	2022/06/13
117	DÜRRBECK	Ulrike	2022/07/21
118	BRESSON	Laurent	2022/09/08
119	DESCLÉE	Ségolène	2022/09/07

Interview methodology

From October 2019 to September 2022, 119 interviews with 89 people, representing more than 200 hours of listening, were carried out. The interviews were mainly conducted by Claire Vincent-Mory (sociologist), Antoine Mourges (historian) and Bernard Granger (psychiatrist). Nicole Jeammet (psychoanalyst) conducted some targeted interviews. On an ad hoc basis, Florian Michel (historian) and Erik Pillet (Commission coordinator) also took part in conducting a few interviews.

With few exceptions, interviews were conducted with only one interviewee at a time. Nearly half of the interviews (n=56; 47%) were conducted by two members of the Commission at the same time for scientific, ethical or efficiency reasons¹. Interviews were conducted in English or French, depending on the preferred language of the interviewee. Despite the context of the COVID pandemic and the global dispersion of L'Arche members, the members of the Commission managed to conduct the majority of interviews in person, face-to-face (n=65; 55%). Most of the face-to-face interviews took place in France, but also for some in Ontario (Canada) during a research visit by three members of the Study Commission in November 2021. The other interviews took place been conducted by video – Zoom, Teams (n=44; 37%), a few by telephone. In three cases, in accordance with the wishes of the interviewees, the interviews were conducted in writing (exchange of questions and answers by email).

1. First, given the mass of information and data, conducting the interview in pairs made it possible to be more precise in the dialogue. Then, it sometimes seemed more appropriate to avoid the face-to-face effect, particularly when the interviews touched on more sensitive issues. Thirdly, because of the cross-referencing of research questions, it was sometimes more effective to invite the person just once to submit to the interview exercise, addressing on a single occasion the different themes that interested the researchers. Sometimes, conversely, the mass of questions made it necessary to conduct several successive interviews with the same interviewee – the table of interviews bears witness to this.

A qualitative method

In a concerted manner, four members of the Commission conducted interviews, each according to the methodological rules specific to their discipline (sociology, history, psychiatry, psychoanalysis). This section exclusively presents the investigation and administration of evidence system followed by Claire Vincent-Mory and Antoine Mourges.

If the evidence in the humanities and social sciences is located both in “the calculation, the argument and the story¹”, the survey in human and social sciences of the Study Commission has chosen to mobilize a qualitative methodology, particularly indicated in the case of a sensitive subject of inquiry requiring the establishment of relationships of trust and adjustment of the relationships of inquiry case by case². The production of the interview is already a sociological task – the discourses that are analysed next would not exist without the intervention of the researcher. Their realization followed classic methodological rules in qualitative sociology³. The sociological interviews were conducted according to several grids constructed for each category of actor presented in the following section. Each individual interview grid was developed based on prior knowledge acquired by the investigator and according to the investigation situation. However, all the grids included common threads of questioning, such as the experience of authority in L’Arche or the relationship to the figure of J. Vanier.

Two main interview methods were used: semi-directive interviews and non-directive interviews (open, in-depth, and in some biographical

1. Jean-Claude Passeron, “La forme des preuves dans les sciences historiques”[NdT: The status of evidences in the Historical Sciences], *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, t. 39, No. 120, 2001, p. 36

2.. In addition, the conditions for a quantitative survey were impossible for the Commission to meet (calendar, resources and material means, health context and limitation of travel).

3. See for example Stéphane Beaud, Florence Weber, *Guide de l’enquête de terrain*, Paris, La Découverte, 1997; *Langage et société*, vol. 1, No. 123: “Pratique de l’entretien: construction du sens et de l’interaction”, 2008.

cases¹). This second method gives a prominent place to individual speech: “The interaction governed by the principle of non-directivity seems to grant the speaking subject greater mastery and control over his own speech.” As Didier Demazière points out, it is, for this reason, an excellent tool for observing the postures and the construction of discourse by the respondents – discourse to which our survey paid special attention. The interviews were deliberately constructed to capture individual pathways (careers in L’Arche; trajectories of abuse; etc.) and the subjective and singular ways of categorizing lived experience (which categories of thought? Which value judgments? etc.).

Inductive, the analysis of the corpus of interviews was based on the systematic cross-referencing of available empirical material (corpus of interviews, archival documents and personal documents entrusted by people – correspondence, written testimonies, etc.). Neither illustrative (the interviews are not just a source of information) nor restitutive (an interview does not speak for itself), the qualitative analysis of the interviews followed a double aim. The first was to enter into the internal logic of each person heard to report on it³, bringing each time – as much as possible – socio-historical density and intelligibility. The second was to compare the paths, the situations or the profiles by confronting them with each other, with a constant concern to grasp the regularities, the disparities, to identify points of nuance or “contrary cases⁴”, according to a method that can be described as “lighting” or “off-center” analysis.

The corpus of interviews was the subject of a fine analysis based mainly on the construction and analysis of extensive verbatim, implying the methodical identification of lexical fields, recurrences of vocabulary, categories of thought, processes of justification or explanation, etc. This stage of work allowed the construction of typologies and

1. Didier Demazière, “L’entretien biographique comme interaction. Négociations, contre-interprétations, ajustements de sens”, *Langage et société*, vol. 1, No. 123, 2008, p. 15-35.

2. Didier Demazière, “À qui peut-on se fier ? Les sociologues et la parole des interviewés”, *Langage et société*, vol. 121-122, n° 3-4, 2007, p. 85-100.

3. Didier Demazière, Claude Dubar, *Analyser les entretiens biographiques. L’exemple des récits d’insertion*, Paris, Nathan, Paris, 1997

4. Daniel Cefai, *L’enquête de terrain*, Paris, La Découverte, 2003, p. 350-362.

relational diagrams which are presented in parts 4 and 5 of the report. Secondly, some interviews that we have identified as particularly significant and relevant for the exposure and understanding of relational configurations have been taken as case studies¹, and have been the subject of trajectory writing work. One of these trajectories is present in chapter 12 (“Alice at Mu”). Thirdly, particular attention was paid to the language of the interviewees, that is to say to the behaviour of the speech, to the choice of vocabulary, but also to the gaps, the absences, the unspoken, insofar as it is good “through the putting into words of reality that it acquires meaning, whether these words are exchanged or whether they remain in the state of mute thought inside the subject²”. A particular point of attention was given to the distancing of the “L’Arche” language. The ordinary vocabulary used by the members of L’Arche – particularly its detailed uses and its euphemisms – constitutes a fascinating subject of research that deserves further study.

Presentation of the corpus

The qualitative sampling was done from the prior establishment of four categories of people with whom the Commission deemed it useful to conduct its qualitative survey to answer the research questions that were its own. The first category concerns people declaring to have been victims or survivors of an abusive relationship, or partners of a transgressive relationship with the founder of L’Arche, with T. Philippe or

1. The case is “something other than an example”. It is a situation chosen by the researcher to build his reasoning because it juxtaposes facts in a relevant or surprising way, because it presents a logical aporia or because it manifests instructive tensions. The case analysis aims to identify configurations, mechanisms, and to specify the conditions under which processes are likely to occur, because it juxtaposes facts in a surprising way, because it presents a logical aporia”, or because it shows a conflict between rules and the applications that can be deduced from them. Camille Hamidi, “De quoi un cas est-il le cas? Penser les cas limites” [NdT : What is a case of? Thinking about borderline cases], *Politix*, vol. 4, No. 100, 2012, p. 85-98; Jean-Claude Passeron, Jacques Revel (dir.), *Penser par cas*, Paris, Editions de l’EHESS, 2005, p. 16-18.

2. Didier Demazière, “À qui peut-on se fier ? Les sociologues et la parole des interviewés”, *Langage et société*, vol. 121-122, n° 3-4, 2007, p. 85-100

with other members of L’Arche who seem to have been introduced to the group’s “mystical-sexual” beliefs and practices. The second category includes witnesses to the history of L’Arche, particularly in the community to which J. Vanier and T. Philippe belong (Trosly-Breuil). A third category brings together close friends of J. Vanier who are not necessarily members or witnesses of the history of L’Arche; Finally, the fourth category (decisive for the treatment of the question of authority in the third part of the report) brings together members of L’Arche who have held positions of responsibility at different levels (community, country, zone or region, federation) and at different periods, from 1964 to the present day. Of course, these groups are not hermetic to each other and people are simultaneously covered by several groups.

Identification was made using several methods. Using the so-called “snowball” process, we interviewed resource people with excellent knowledge of L’Arche networks to identify others and get information on how best to make contact. Then, each interview was an opportunity to identify new persons. Snowball sampling was particularly indicated in the case of our research, since it was a sensitive subject, which had to be entered into sometimes suspicious circles¹, but also because the aim was to study the network dynamics and power relations². However, because it also has a number of biases³, this snowball sampling was accompanied by other methods of identifying the people to solicit. The first is based on the use of archival documents collected over time. Their analysis made it possible to identify a certain number of additional people (particularly for categories 1 and 4). In addition, informal

1. 15 people approached by the Commission refused to meet it explicitly, in a round-about way, or by not giving an answer. For explicit refusals justified to the Commission, the reasons invoked were age, loyalty or the recognition maintained intact towards J. Vanier and T. Philippe for “the graces received and shared”, or even - in the case of people undoubtedly caught up in abusive or transgressive relationships – because “wanting to stay in peace”, one no longer wanted to talk about it.

2. Jean-Claude Combessie, *La méthode en sociologie*, Paris, La Découverte, 2007, p. 53.

3. In the case of the Commission’s work, one of the biases would have been to stick to fuzzy, predefined groups, which are part of frequent L’Arche representations, such as the so-called “ancient” group, for example. It was essential to remain attentive to the preconceptions conveyed by the people met and to find the right distance with the “lists” of people to meet, given to the researchers, to encourage a diversity of points of view and profiles and avoid the effect of ‘entre-soi’.

discussion times with members of L'Arche made it possible to collect useful information from time to time to identify other important people to meet. Finally, in the specific case of people claiming to be victims or survivors of an abusive relationship with the founder, the methods of identification are set out in the fourth part of the report.

For each category, the aim was to try to maintain – as much as possible – some major balances: gender (men and women); membership of L'Arche at the time of the interview (members and non-members); of status among the most frequent in L'Arche (married or in a couple; single; having taken religious vows). At the end of the interview campaign, we observe an over-representation of women, which is due to the subject of our research: people declaring themselves victims, survivors or caught in a confused transgressive relationship that the Commission heard in interview are exclusively women.

	Total	Men	Women
Number of people inter-viewed	89 100 %	36 40 %	53 60 %
<i>including</i>			
Members of L'Arche at the time of the interview	53 59,5 %	20 22,5 %	33 37 %
Non-members of L'Arche at the time of the interview	36 40 %	16 18 %	20 22 %
Married or living together	43 48 %	20 22 %	23 26 %
Having taken religious vows*	16 18 %	9 10 %	7 8 %
Single	30 34 %	7 8 %	23 26 %

* Priest of the Catholic Church, monk, nun, consecrated virgin, consecrated layman.

Reading example: Among the people interviewed, 23 people, i.e. 26% of the panel, are single women

Secondly, an effort has been made to hear from people who have been members of L'Arche at all times, and who have had varied experiences of community life in L'Arche. Taken together, the people interviewed have lived in at least¹ 33 different L'Arche communities located in 13 different countries:

Geographical regions	Pays	No. of communities
Africa and Middle East	Burkina Faso; Ivory Coast; Palestine	3
North America	Canada; United States; Mexico	11
Central America and the Caribbean	Haiti; Honduras	4
Asia	India	2
Europe	Germany; France; UK	12
Oceania	Australia	1
Total	13	32

Ethical Approach

The interview campaign followed an ethical protocol observing a principle of absolute respect for the wishes expressed by each person contacted in terms of the feasibility of the interview (we respected the wishes of those who did not wish to meet us), method of dialogue with the Commission, but also of confidentiality.

Any contact is accompanied by a consent form intended to allow the person to give their preferences a priori in terms of confidentiality and anonymity. No interview recording was made without explicit permission from the interviewee; the recording was transmitted each time it was requested from the Commission. In addition, while half of the

1. According to the interviewers and the interview methodology, the itinerary in L'Arche of the people interviewed was not the subject of systematic questioning. Therefore, it is highly likely that the diversity of communities presented in this table is underestimated.

recorded interviews were fully transcribed to enable their qualitative analysis, the use of two professional transcriptionists was the subject of a contract comprising a protocol for securing data and preserving confidentiality, anonymity of all interviewees¹.

The confidentiality preferences of each interviewee were strictly respected. In the course of the work, this resulted, for example, in a few cases in the establishment of a watertight boundary between the researcher members of the Commission and the coordinator Erik Pillet. Moreover, respect for preferences in terms of anonymization explains the diversity of citation methods in the report: for the demonstration of its results, the members of the Commission gave preference as far as possible to citations from non-anonymized interviews – this which explains in particular the prevalence of the use of some compared to others. When the interviewee has accepted that his name appears in the table of interviews but wishes that any quotes from his interview remain anonymous, this is indicated in a footnote (for example “Anonymous interview”). Finally, when the interviewee has chosen total anonymity, his name is replaced by a nickname, including in the interview table.

The Commission’s ethical approach has been the subject of specific reflection with regard to people presenting themselves as victims or survivors of situations of control and abuse of partners in confused transgressive relationships. Particular attention has been paid to the construction of secure maintenance conditions in line with their preferences. The members of the Commission benefited from the enlightened advice of professionals in the support of abused people to adjust their investigative approach.

The terms, pace and conditions of dialogue with each person were built on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, if at the time of making contact, some had already made a long journey of awareness and exit from the process of influence and the abusive relationship, a certain number were only at the very beginning – even had kept the abusive relationship secret until then. Without being original, this method has proven to be particularly demanding.

1. We thank the transcribers, the company Perfect Sense and Miss Camille Gréciet for their quality work.

First of all, the preliminary construction of a relationship of trust consisted in particular in ensuring that the interviewees had an environment capable of supporting them (psychological support in particular) and, if necessary, of “receiving” them after an interview with a member of the Commission. The members of the Commission had to adjust to the rhythm of the exchanges chosen by each interlocutor, sometimes imposing many steps prior to the actual interview. These adjustments required researchers to show availability, patience and also responsiveness when necessary.

In most cases, the communication was done in person: physical meeting, dialogue via zoom or by telephone. In other cases, the communication – and then the interview – took place in writing, sometimes using an anonymous mailbox created especially for this contact. In a few cases, the members of the Commission had to go through a trusted third party¹ – identified through access to some of the documents from previous investigations.

Then, the level of confidentiality was set by each person. Each was able to choose the member(s) of the Commission with whom she wished to discuss, to choose whether or not the interview(s) could be shared with all the members of the Commission, whether or not her name could be shared confidentially with the members of the Commission, etc. For example, one woman chose to communicate with only one member of the Commission, confidentially; the other members of the Commission only had access to her pseudonym and to a report of the interview that she had validated.

Thirdly, one of the challenges posed by this work was that of explicitly positioning the Commission’s approach. It pursues an objective of scientific investigation. It is neither a psychological listening cell, nor an investigative commission aimed at building a case for legal

1. The use of a trusted third party – an intermediary – between the Commission and the interviewee represented one of the challenges of the work of the Commission. While in several cases going through such a third party has unquestionably facilitated dialogue and the establishment of relationships of trust, in a few cases the results are more uncertain. In one case in particular, it was necessary at each stage to negotiate and convince the intermediary, who also acted as reviewer and, to a certain extent, censor of the questions asked by the Commission.

proceedings. However, if the objective of the work is clear, the dialogue with its interlocutors has brought into play complex dynamics which tend to blur the boundaries between these three categories of stakeholders (scientific research, psychological support, judicial investigation). Investigative work takes the risk of interfering both with the psychological process experienced by people, but also, if possible, with legal proceedings (ecclesial or state), particularly through the production of interviews or the collection of personal archival documents. We remind you that explaining our position was all the more important since no one, to date, has filed a complaint before a civil or criminal court in their country. When certain facts brought to our attention seemed likely to have legal consequences, we alerted the persons concerned each time and wrote nothing without their explicit agreement.

Table of archive documents analysed in chapter 12

	Date	Title and descriptive elements	Archive Collection
A	1966	Authority and Authoritarianism. Handwritten notes from JV	ACJV
B	12/1966	Authority. JV conference at the Maison de l'Europe, Paris.	ACJV
C	1970	Untitled. Doc typist written by JV	AAT
D	1970	L'Arche project. JV report	AAT
E	26/8/1970	The Good Shepherd. Conference given by JV during the retreat at Mont Roland (typed and handwritten notes)	ACJV
F	26/1/1976	To be a servant and Shepherd. Authority in the Community. JV	ACJV
G	3-5/12/1976	Loyalty and Commitment. Talk given by JV during a weekend of reflection in Trosly	AAT
H	3-5/12/1976	Person, Community, Society. Talk given by T. Philippe during the weekend of reflection in Trosly	AAT
I	1976	Some reflections on the government of a Christian community such as L'Arche. JV.	AAT
J	1980	Authority. Conference given by JV during the Interlude in 1980 in Courchevel (France)	ACJV
K	10/5/1982	Authority. Handwritten plan of a JV report	ACJV
L	Mai 1986	Untitled. Handwritten doc by JV	ACJV
M	2/12/1986	Training of over 1 year with JV on Authority. 2 nd meeting	ACJV
N	5/12/1986	Training on Authority Handwritten Notes of JV	ACJV
O	5/12/1986	Formation aux assistants du travail. Notes JV	ACJV
P	17/12/1986	Authority? domains. Notes JV	ACJV
Q	18/12/1986	Formation of over 1 year assistants with JV on Authority. 3 rd meeting	ACJV

R	9/4/1987	Training of over 1 year assistants with JV on Authority. 6 th meeting	ACJV
S	5/2/1987	Training of over 1 year assistants with JV on Authority. 5 th meeting	ACJV
T	6/1/1987	Training of over 1 year assistants with JV on the Authority. 4 th meeting	ACJV
U	1980-1990	Role of a house leader. JV Notes	ACJV
V	1987	Untitled. JV Notes	ACJV
W	6/1/1987	Authority JV Notes	ACJV
X	27/4/1989	Authority. Doc typist support of a training given in Trosly by JV and «Christine»	ACJV
Y	1980's	The Good Shepherd. Typed list and handwritten additions of Bible references used by JV	ACJV
Z	10/4/1990	Authority. Training with JV	ACJV
AA	15-16/02/1998	Anthropology course. One of the signs of maturity: the exercise of authority. JV intervention at l'École de Vie, Trosly	APJV
AB	1990's	Authority. Notes JV	APJV
AC	2007	Training of Shepherds. audio documentation. 5 conferences of 45 min to 1 hour. The Farm, Trosly-Breuil, France	ACJV
AD	2010	Training of Shepherds. audio documentation. 5 conferences of 45 min to 1 hour.	ACJV
AE	29/11/2011	Authority & Leadership. Notes of JV.	APJV
AF	4/2012	Leadership in L'Arche seen through the 10 th chapter of the Gospel of John. Text from JV: "This text was written for Joe Egan and Hollee who asked me to write something about what is particular in the exercise of authority in L'Arche"	APJV
AG	After 2010	Authority Notes JV	APJV
AH	11/2013	Authority, Responsibility, Leadership. Conference by JV on the occasion of the "International Meeting of Directors"	APJV
AI	Winter 2013	<i>Pour la suite du monde</i> , Publication of L'Arche Canada, vol.12, No. 4, Winter 2013. Interview of JV on the exercise of leadership	APJV
AJ	13-14/02/2016	Authority. Retreat. JV's handwritten notes with detailed book plan " <i>Community and growth</i> "	APJV

THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission is made up of six researchers, authors of the report. Their work has received support and has been enriched thanks to the contribution of two persons external to the research field.

BERNARD GRANGER is a psychiatrist and psychotherapist, a professor at the University of Paris and Head of the Psychiatry Department at Cochin hospital, and is a member of the *Association française de thérapies cognitives et comportementales (French Association for Cognitive and Behavioural Therapies)*. He founded and edited the journal *Psychiatrie, Sciences humaines, Neurosciences*. He has been a member of the stewardship board of *Assistance Publique – Hôpitaux de Paris* since 2015. He is a member of the independent expert commission advising bishops regarding priests accused of paedophilia in their diocese. He is also a member of the national mediation body for staff of public health, social and medical-social institutions. His work deals, in particular, with psychological harassment in the professional environment and on personality disorders.

NICOLE JEAMMET trained both as a psychoanalyst and theologian. She is an honorary lecturer in psycho-pathology at Paris V and taught at the Sèvres Centre. She practised as a psychotherapist for mothers and children at the Centre de Guidance du Pr. M. Soulé and at the Vallée Foundation. What makes a good life, what does it mean to love, what is a fair relationship with another person and the question of God are all themes which she explores in her many works; in particular: *La Haine nécessaire (Necessary hatred)* (PUF: 1989); *Les Destins de la culpabilité (Destinies of Guilt)* (PUF: 1993); *Les Violences morales (Moral violence)* (Odile Jacob: 2001); *Amour, sexualité, tendresse : la réconciliation ? (Love, sexuality*

and tenderness: a reconciliation?) (Odile Jacob: 2005); *Le célibat pour Dieu (Celibacy for God)* (Le cerf: 2009). With Ph. Jeammet *Lettre aux couples d'aujourd'hui (Letter to the couples of today)* (Bayard 2012) and, published in February 2021, *Sommes-nous tous violents ? (Are we all violent?)* (ed. Eyrolles) co-written with Ph. Haddad, GH Masson and Tarik Abou Nour.

FLORIAN MICHEL is a historian with a doctorate in history and religious science. He is a professor in modern history at the University Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne. He has been Director of the Pierre-Mendès-France centre since June 2016. He is a member of the Faculty of History at the Sorbonne. He teaches North American history, the history of international relations and the history of religions and secularization. His publications include, in particular, *La pensée catholique en Amérique du Nord (Catholic thought in North America)* (DDB: 2010), *Traduire la liturgie (Translating the liturgy)* (CLD: 2013), *Diplomatie et religion (Diplomacy and religion)* (Presses de la Sorbonne: 2016), as well as a biography of Étienne Gilson (Vrin: 2018). He co-edited the work *À la droite du Père. Les catholiques et les droites en France depuis 1945 (To the right of the Father. Catholics and right-wing parties in France since 1945)* (Seuil : 2022). He is vice-chair of the Jacques and Raïssa Maritain Research Group.

ANTOINE MOURGES is a secondary school history and geography teacher. He lived in a L'Arche community from 2001 to 2005 (Le Caillou Blanc, Finistère). In 2009, under the supervision of Michel Fourcade, he completed a Masters in the History of Religion on the genesis of the L'Arche communities founded by Jean Vanier. This work led him to write the first historical study on the "école de sagesse" [*school of wisdom*] at l'Eau vive (1946-1956), initiated by Thomas Philippe. In September 2017, he began his doctorate on the history of the congregation of the Little Brothers of Jesus (1926-1966) under the supervision of Michel Fourcade at the university Paul Valéry Montpellier 3. At the request of L'Arche International, he took part in the first 2019 investigations on Jean Vanier's involvement in Thomas Philippe's deviations and is the author of a first historical report (unpublished). The conclusions in this

report have been taken up in the work following the revelations on Jean Vanier in February 2020.

GWENNOLA RIMBAUT has a doctorate in theology, the subject of her thesis being spiritual anthropology and its articulation with the Christian faith. In addition to her role as lecturer in practical theology at the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Angers, France (UCO), she has held various pastoral responsibilities in the hospital and health sector. At present, her theological reflection focusses on the voice of people in situations of hardship, working especially with the Centre Sèvres (the Jesuit Faculty in Paris) and with several associations in the field. Her publications include: *Les pauvres interdits de spiritualité? La foi des chrétiens du Quart Monde, (No spirituality for the poor? Christian faith of people in the "fourth world")* (l'Harmattan : 2009) ; *Soutenir une démarche spirituelle en milieu hospitalier, (Supporting a spiritual journey in hospital)* (Novalis/Lumen Vitae: 2006) ; *Qu'est-ce qui fait vivre encore quand tout s'écroule ? Une théologie à l'école des plus pauvres (What is it that makes life worth living when everything is falling apart? Theology at the school of the poor)* GRIEU Etienne, RIMBAUT Gwennola et BLANCHON Laure (dir.), (Lumen Vitae: 2017).

CLAIRE VINCENT-MORY holds a doctorate in sociology and is a researcher attached to the Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics (CEE) at Sciences Po and is member of the Institut Convergences Migrations. Since her doctoral thesis, which she defended in 2018, at the University of Paris Nanterre, her research has mainly focused on the political representation in political, associative or institutional arenas, of marginalised groups (in particular migrants, ethno-racial or religious groups and people with disabilities) in the European public sphere. She is part of several international research projects (INCLUSIVEPARL, REPCHANCE). On this, she co-edited a work entitled *Le religieux au prisme de l'ethnicisation et de la racisation (Looking at religion through the prism of ethnicisation and racialisation)*, which was published by Petra in 2019. She has also published various articles and co-edited chapters. <https://sciences-po.academia.edu/ClaireVincentMory>

ERIK PILLET was essential to the Commission's work in his task as coordinator, providing operational support and liaising with L'Arche, the scientific committee, external interlocutors and so on. He is retired and recently stood down as community leader of the community "L'Arche en Pays Toulousain", which he founded in 2012 with his wife. He spent the majority of his career in human resources for large companies (Alcatel, France Telecom and Airbus). He has accompanied L'Arche on its journey for 40 years and was Board Chair of L'Arche in France from 2004 to 2011.

ALAIN CORDIER was a valuable interlocutor in discussions within the Commission whose members greatly benefitted from his experience, particularly with the CIASE (French Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church). He is an honorary inspector general of finances, and a director for *France Parkinson* (French Association for Parkinson Disease), for the *Amis de l'Arche* and for the Immunopathology innovation fund. He was, in particular, a member of the CIASE; member of the *Collège de la Haute Autorité de Santé* (Health Products Evaluation Agency) and Chair of the *Commission des stratégies de prise en charge* (Care Strategy Committee), vice-Chair of the *Comité consultatif national d'éthique* (National Consultative Ethics Committee), Chair of the steering committee of the *Agence de Biomédecine* (Biomedical Research Agency), Chair of the Board of the *Caisse nationale de solidarité pour l'autonomie* (National Solidarity Fund for Autonomy), Chair of the Management Board of *Bayard Presse* and Director-General of *Assistance Publique-Hôpitaux de Paris* (University Hospital Trust for the Paris hospitals).

THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

The Commission regularly reported on the progress of its work, its methodological choices and the results of its analyses to a scientific Committee made up of well-known specialists in the fields addressed by the survey: Marie Balmery, psychoanalyst; Céline Béraud, sociologist and director of research at the EHESS; Guillaume Cuchet, historian and professor at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne; Karlijn Demasure, theologian and professor at the Pontifical Gregorian

University in Rome; Véronique Margron, Dominican sister and provincial prioress of France, professor of moral theology and dean of the Catholic University of the West, Chair of CORREF; Christian Salenson, theologian, priest of the diocese of Nîmes and director of the Institute of Sciences and Theology of Religions of the Mediterranean Catholic Institute in Marseille; Jean-Guilhem Xerri, biologist and psychoanalyst.

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