

Summary of the Study Commission's report
mandated by L'Arche International

**Abuse and psychological coercion
An investigation into Thomas Philippe,
Jean Vanier and L'Arche**

JANUARY 2023

This is a summary of the work of the Study Commission mandated by L'Arche International in Autumn 2020. This followed the revelation in February 2020 of the consistent testimonies of six women, all in agreement with each other, which brought to light abuse committed by Jean Vanier, and his long-time knowledge of abuse committed by Thomas Philippe. **The main instruction given to the Commission, in a 'mission-letter' was as follows:** to shed light on the history of L'Arche's foundation, to identify the relational, cultural and institutional dynamics at work that may have fostered the abuse, to highlight Jean Vanier's life story, his connection with Thomas Philippe and his degree of belief in the deviant mysticism into which he himself was initiated.

The Commission consists of six researchers of different disciplines: history, sociology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis and theology¹. It has met every month over a period of two years using a multi-disciplinary approach. A verification council, to which the Commission could regularly present its work, was also set up.²

The investigation covers a period of over 90 years, from Jean Vanier's birth in Geneva in 1928 till his death in 2019.

The goal of the Commission was not to retrace the history of L'Arche, nor to investigate situations of psychological hold or abuse that had no connection with Thomas Philippe or Jean Vanier. Nor did it have the competence to draw a portrait of Jean Vanier, balancing his faults against his merits, nor to suggest what L'Arche's attitude towards its founders should be.

The report is organized into seven parts. The first part deals with Jean Vanier's history, examining biographical elements. Specifically, it traces the different stages of his formation and the human and ecclesial network that surrounded him. The next part also focuses on history, assessing the human, spiritual and cultural continuities between Eau Vive and L'Arche. The third part considers, from a sociological point of view, the practices, governance and authority at L'Arche vis à vis Jean Vanier. Thomas Philippe's and Jean Vanier's abuses are analyzed in the fourth part. Given its importance, it was decided to develop this section more fully than the other parts of this summary. The fifth part presents the psychiatric hypotheses concerning the two men. The sixth part gives a psycho-analytical view of Jean Vanier's life-path and the seventh a critical analysis of his spirituality.

The investigation is founded on a solid documentary base: the archives of L'Arche, of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, of the dioceses and of the religious congregations concerned, the Dominicans, the Carmelites, the 'Little Sisters of the Holy Virgin' and the Brothers of Saint Jean among others. The investigation is also based on a corpus of interviews conducted according to the methodological rules proper to each discipline represented in the Commission: in total, 119 interviews with 89 persons. The theological analysis is based on 15 books by Jean Vanier, covering his whole period of activity.

We have had fruitful discussions with the Dominicans of the Province of France and with the Brothers of Saint Jean. Both orders have set up their own study Commissions, the first concerning Thomas Philippe and the second on his brother, Marie-Dominique Philippe.

As an independent body, the Commission was free to choose its method and interpretations. Nothing has been stated without a scrupulous checking of the sources and testimonies.

As responsible academics, the researchers want to publicize the results of their work, in order to finally expose a decades-long culture of secrecy. As an academic work, the report adheres rigorously to the highest academic standards. It rests on a wealth of excerpts from letters and testimonies, only quoted in

¹ Florian Michel and Antoine Mourges are historians, Claire Vincent-Mory a sociologist, Bernard Granger a psychiatrist, Nicole Jeammet a psychoanalyst, and Gwennola Rimbaut a theologian. The Commission includes two 'non-writing' members: Alain Cordier a member of CIASE (a commission dealing with abuse in the RC Church in France) and Erik Pillet, a retired member of L'Arche, who acted as coordinator.

² With the help of Marie Balmery, Céline Béraud, Guillaume Cuchet, Karlijn Demasure, Véronique Margron, Christian Salenson and Jean Guilhem Xerri. The academic background of each member of the Study Commission and Scientific Council is available here: https://intranet.larche.org/documents/10181/2994508/Study-commission_scientific-committee_AI_final_EN.pdf/95e55b3e-f431-4b79-810f-f74bc0fb3b31.

part in this summary, without giving the full references that can be found in the report. While the summary contains the main conclusions and hypotheses of the report, it is only the full report itself, with its in-depth, carefully documented analysis, that should be seen as authoritative, and to which the authors fully commit themselves.

Part 1

The Life Journey of Jean Vanier (1928-2019)

CHAPTER 1

The son of a good family (1928-1950)

Jean Vanier was born in Geneva in September 1928. Everything has already been recounted by his biographers and by Jean Vanier himself regarding a childhood spent between Switzerland and Canada, his teenage years as 'cadet' in an English military school, and his years of service as an officer first in the Royal Navy, and then in the Canadian Navy. Describing himself as 'a good boy', Jean Vanier willingly accepted the family model he was part of, which rested on three pillars: the army, service of the State (Canada, the English monarchy, the Empire) and the Catholic Church.

He was vastly influenced by a family environment in which religion was central and where life events, including everyday life, were interpreted as the out-working of Providence.

His father, Georges, had seriously considered becoming a priest. His mother, Pauline, also questioned whether she had a religious vocation. Jean Vanier's maternal grandmother, as well as his mother were given spiritual counsel by Fr Almire Pichon (1843-1919), the confessor and spiritual director of St Thérèse of Lisieux.

In November 1949, Pauline Vanier became a 'tertiary' of the Carmelite convent at Nogent, under the spiritual direction of Thomas Philippe, whom she and her husband had met in 1947. This meant that when Jean Vanier went to Eau Vive in 1950 after 8 years in the Royal and then Canadian Navy, he was in fact meeting the very friar who was counselling his mother.

Analysis of a letter from Thomas Philippe – not kept in the archives – shows that Jean Vanier's decision had his parents' full backing. According to Thomas Philippe, Pauline Vanier was 'in admiration of the ways of Providence', when she heard of the decision: this would not only allow her to meet up again with her son in France after years of separation, but also entrust him to a priest that she admired.

It is highly probable that it was only at Eau Vive that Jean Vanier came across female company. It was the first mixed institution that he had been part of. The image he projected was first that of a devout and amiable officer cadet; then a sporty young officer reading his breviary – much like someone preparing for the priesthood. He was not really focused on his studies, but was taken with the idea of a healthy body in a pious mind. He does not seem to have ever fallen in love.

CHAPTER 2

Jean Vanier, Thomas Philippe and Eau Vive (1950-1956)

In joining the Eau Vive community, Jean Vanier intended to devote himself to God by beginning to discern his vocation. What he expects to be a short period of transition was in fact prolonged to over six years, eventually constituting the founding experience of his life.

Eau Vive was located in Soisy-sur-Seine, in the immediate vicinity of Le Saulchoir, which was a house of the Dominicans of the Province of France. Eau Vive had been founded by Thomas Philippe in 1945 as an international center for formation. Halfway between religious community, Christian youth hostel and an American-style university campus, the center offered an introduction to theology and philosophy as well as to the contemplative life, through Carmelite mysticism and strong Marian devotion.

Although a Dominican, Thomas Philippe represented an intellectual and mystical outlook that was distinct from the mainstream 'historical Thomism' prevailing at Le Saulchoir. In order to curry support for the project, he made use of connections he had made during his time in Rome, and of his title of 'Master in Theology'. Fr Suarez, the Master of the Dominican order, Pope Pius XII, Archbishop Roncalli (future John XXIII), Archbishop Montini (future Paul VI) all looked favorably on the project. Over 60 students were enrolled in 1952, and the summer schools attracted more than 100 participants around famous keynote speakers such as Jacques Maritain or Fr Charles Journet. Marie-Dominique Philippe, also a Dominican, was often called upon to teach courses.

Eau Vive maintained a close connection with several women's communities, with which it formed 'a small contemplative colony on the outskirts of Paris', where Thomas Philippe often preached and gave spiritual direction to many religious sisters. Thomas Philippe's sister had left a lasting influence as former prioress (Mother Cécile) of the Dominican nuns' convent of the Cross and Compassion, located on a property next door to Eau Vive. She eventually left this convent to go and found another in Bouvines, on the property of her Dehau grandparents. Close connections were also maintained with the Christ-Roi Carmel in Nogent-sur-Marne, where a first cousin of Thomas Philippe's was a religious sister, Marie-Madeleine du Sacré-Coeur (née Marie-Madeleine Wamberghe). In addition, they were in close contact with the Épiphanie convent, which belonged to the Dominican congregation of Notre-Dame-des Tourelles. The formation at Eau Vive was well suited to the religious sisters from this convent, which had a reputation for intellectual rigor.

The uncle of the two Philippe brothers, Fr Thomas Dehau, acted - in the words of Jean Vanier - as the 'hidden prophet' of the Eau Vive spiritual family. In the first half of the 20th century, he was one of the great figures of the Dominican order in France. He regularly preached in contemplative women's communities, and was the spiritual guide of many Catholic intellectuals. He was much involved in the life of the Philippe family, which probably in part accounted for the fact that eight out of his younger sister's twelve children decided to enter religious life: three girls became Benedictine nuns, one a Dominican, and four of the boys became Dominicans. Thomas Dehau acted as 'spiritual father' to several of them, including Thomas, Cécile and Marie-Dominique Philippe.

Thomas Philippe developed a system of unorthodox beliefs and practices. According to his own account, it all began in 1938 when he was teaching at the Angelicum in Rome. While there, he believed that he received 'very obscure graces' the character of which involved the 'sexual organs'. He then experienced a mystical union with Mary. This all took place in front of a fresco called *Mater mirabilis*, located in a chapel of the Trinita-dei-Monti convent. 'My whole body was taken up, all night, in contemplation and very intimate union with Her. It was like getting to know Mary afresh.'

He felt the need to impart those 'graces' to others and developed theological arguments to justify his sexual practices with nuns or young lay women aspiring to a religious vocation. This behavior took place at convents of the contemplative Dominican nuns (Étiolles and Bouvines), at Carmelite convents (Nogent, Boulogne-Billancourt and Figeac) and at the Eau Vive community itself.

Mother Cécile Philippe pushed several of her nuns into her brother's arms while having homosexual relationships with several of them herself and incestuous relations with her brother. There is no evidence that Marie-Dominique Philippe was involved in these practices in the early 1950s, but it seems more than likely: he encouraged one of his brother's victims, whose spiritual director he was, to engage in this behavior with himself. It is worth noting that Paul Philippe (no relation to the Dehau-Philippe family), who, as Holy Office Commissioner, played a central role in Thomas Philippe's trial, reported that in 1956, Thomas Dehau admitted doing 'mysterious things' with several nuns.

At the end of 1950, some outsiders perceived the first signs of the disorder that was secretly developing. The first such statement followed a canonical visit by the Vicar-General of the Paris diocese, who was Vice-Superior of the Nogent Carmel. He simply wrote a rather severe letter to Thomas Philippe and also reprimanded the prioress, asking her to monitor the friar's visits more closely. However, he did not discover the exact nature of Thomas Philippe's relationships with several nuns of the Carmel. Fr Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus (OCD) was the first to bring it all to light in March 1951. This resulted in the removal of the prioress; in addition, Thomas Philippe was forbidden to continue any involvement in that Carmel. But nothing of this was reported to the Holy Office (the Vatican).

In May 1951, two women who were living at Eau Vive, alerted some Dominicans of the province of France, as well as Fr Charles Journet, about what they had undergone. Those two accusations resulted in the opening of an investigation by the Holy Office in April 1952.

It is easy to establish that Jean Vanier became Thomas Philippe's spiritual son and fell under his influence. He shared his intellectual tastes, his devotions, his ways of praying. His unwavering commitment to his spiritual master led to him being held up as 'Thomas Philippe's most fanatical disciple' in a report to the Pope. This phrase was used before the Holy Office had any definite proof of his involvement in Thomas Philippe's sexual practices. It simply indicated his staunch devotion to the Dominican between 1952 and 1956, as he sought to defend him and ensure the survival of Eau Vive.

This begs the question of how Thomas Philippe established such a strong hold over Jean Vanier throughout that period. The Commission was able to distinguish two stages in the process.

From September 1950 until Thomas Philippe's departure from Eau Vive on 3 April 1952, a relationship of spiritual filiation was progressively woven between the two men, without Jean Vanier being introduced to the Dominican's secret beliefs and practices. Jean Vanier perceived Eau Vive was imbued with the evangelical spirit of the first Christian communities. Thomas Philippe's influence on Jean Vanier was shown in his reading matter, such as Fr Thomas Dehau's most famous book. Scarcely two months after Jean Vanier's arrival at Eau Vive, Thomas Philippe chose him to accompany him to Rome on the occasion of the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption. Several such trips gave Jean Vanier the opportunity to spend long periods with Thomas Philippe. He placed himself under the Dominican's spiritual direction, listened to his sermons, attended his talks and felt touched by his Marian spirituality. One of the first gestures that Thomas Philippe used to initiate those he counselled was to make them pray 'with their heads placed on his heart, as St John did at the Last Supper'. The Holy Office recorded the testimony of a woman indicating that Jean Vanier often prayed on Fr Thomas's heart.

Over 50 years later, in 2009, Jean Vanier still recalled very clearly his feelings for the Dominican: 'His words penetrated and opened my heart. By listening to him and being in his presence, I had a taste for God, for loving Jesus and Mary, for following Jesus to the end. I felt transformed in his presence. He was a presence of God for me. I still remember as if it were yesterday the talks he gave "on silence". This shows how deeply Jesus used him to enter into me.'

The second stage, between April 1952 to the end of the trial in May 1956, saw Jean Vanier's initiation into his spiritual father's sexual practices and the development of his leadership qualities as the new head of Eau Vive. From his own testimony, Jean Vanier dates his initiation into the mystical-sexual practices to two months after Thomas Philippe's departure from Eau Vive. At that point, he began an intimate relationship with Jacqueline d'Halluin, one of the women close to Thomas Philippe who had herself been 'initiated' by him. She later played an important part in the beginnings of L'Arche. In a 2016 interview with the leaders of L'Arche, Jean Vanier reported that the two of them 'were praying together that day, when suddenly this woman found herself in his arms.' Jean Vanier referred to this as a founding spiritual experience at the origin of his vocation, the fruit of which would be the foundation of L'Arche.

Even in his absence, Thomas Philippe was kept closely informed about Jean Vanier's initiation into the 'graces' and the major role of Jacqueline d'Halluin and Anne de Rosambo. The latter, a former novice at the La Croix convent, later joined Eau Vive where, once 'initiated' by Thomas Philippe, she became one of his most fervent disciples. In a note from Thomas Philippe, which can be dated to 1952, we can read this extremely significant passage: '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 strengthen us; they bring us life. (...) M. obviously wants to use A. (Anne de Rosambo) and Jac. (Jacqueline d'Halluin) for you. They are the ones who should give you advice and strength; they take the place of N. (Thomas Philippe) and I believe that you should not seek light elsewhere...'

In order to silence Thomas Philippe's defenders and take control of Eau Vive, the leaders of the Dominican Province of France informed a number of key people of the charges against him. But this communication only served to feed the lasting conviction of several people close to Thomas Philippe that the accusations were slanderous. This was the case with Jean Vanier's parents. This was also the position of the members of the management board of Eau Vive. Eau Vive also got the same support from members of the Félix Dehau Foundation who were all first cousins of Thomas Philippe.

Jean Vanier and the Eau Vive team could therefore rely on that group of influential figures, who were convinced of the justice of their cause, and who defended the position of Jean Vanier, as leader of Eau Vive, in opposition to the Dominican Province of France.

After the complete breakdown in the relationship with the Dominican order, when the doors of Le Saulchoir were closed to the students of Eau Vive, only the nucleus of those faithful to Thomas Philippe remained, consisting mainly of a small group of women. Jean Vanier asserted himself as the leader of this group of resisters, lobbying intensely, particularly within the Church.

At the end of Thomas Philippe's trial, the enduring power of Jean Vanier and the Eau Vive women convinced the Holy Office to demand the immediate departure of J Vanier and the group of women surrounding him. On 28 May 1956, the decision was made to close Eau Vive.

Work with the archives has allowed us to confirm that Thomas Philippe, who had been forbidden to communicate with the members of Eau Vive since 1952, continued to influence Jean Vanier from the various places where he was held in secret. This took place through ongoing exchanges of correspondence and direct encounters. Jean Vanier and his master soon became experts in the art of secrecy and dissimulation. With Jean Vanier's help, Thomas Philippe carried on his mystical-sexual relationships with the women who remained faithful to him. He called them the 'tout-petits' (the little ones).

Jean Vanier and the members of Eau Vive pursued a wholly deceptive strategy of dissociating the community from its founder: they made a sharp distinction between Thomas Philippe's public teachings, which were irreproachable according to them, and his private teachings which, in their view, did not concern Eau Vive. We must here point out the relative inaction of the Holy Office and the Dominican order on this matter between June 1952 and October 1955. During the period between 1952 and 1956, Thomas Philippe was shifted from one place to another. He spent two years in Longueil-Annel in the Oise region where there was an institution for troubled adolescents run by Doctor Préaut. This man became an important supporter of Thomas Philippe, going on to play a major role in his installation in Trosly-Breuil in 1964, followed by the 'tout-petits'.

A new and particularly serious allegation persuaded Fr Paul Philippe - the Holy Office Commissioner from 30 May 1955 - to re-open the investigation with an urgency that was in marked contrast to the slowness of the previous period. In addition to the elements that he recorded regarding the scope and exact nature of the facts, he was informed of an abortion that took place in 1947. In a 'mystical' twist, the dead foetus was venerated as something sacred, linked to the 'Most Holy Virgin's secret'. The aborted baby was the fruit of the sexual relationship between Thomas Philippe and Anne de Rosambo. Mother Thérèse, the former prioress of the Carmel at Nogent-sur-Marne, confirmed the facts and admitted her own involvement. Nothing in the sources indicates that Jean Vanier was informed.

As early as December 1955, Thomas Philippe was moved from Longueil-Annel to Barra near Naples to isolate him from the members of Eau Vive and prepare for his trial. In May 1956, he was found

guilty of serious sexual abuse of adult women: this had involved the sacrament of penance, the use of false mysticism to justify such acts and the procuring of an abortion. His condemnation stripped him of his ability to exercise any form of public or private ministry. The loyalty of Jean Vanier and the members of Eau Vive to Thomas Philippe resulted in the dispersion of the group by the Holy Office. But this would not prevent the 'tout-petits' from remaining connected.

CHAPTER 3

Quasi-priest and prophet

A desire for priesthood that was at first thwarted and then finally prevented.

Regarding Jean Vanier's vocational path, the Commission's account varies significantly from the description later given by him and his biographers.

Within the close circle of Thomas Philippe's disciples, Jean Vanier internalized the beliefs of the group with growing intensity. The correspondence between the two men reveals the master's insistence on showing his disciple the significance of the 'preferential love' that the Virgin Mary has for him in particular: 'The Holy Virgin has shown me many things for you. She wants to introduce you more and more into her intimacy. She will also perhaps ask for many sacrifices; but her love will eventually triumph over all; and be assured that what she has in store for you comes from the special love she has for you'.

This mission entrusted to him through Thomas Philippe's mediation became, in Jean Vanier's eyes, his vocation. While to those close to him, he asserted his conviction that he was being called to the priesthood, this project became inseparable from the secret mission assigned to him. For Jean Vanier, the public assertion of his vocation to the priesthood was also a way of reassuring his family and friends, of providing a cover. With this in mind, Thomas Philippe wrote to him *a propos* his mother at the end of 1952: 'As to your mother, be careful about yr relationships with Pi (Anne de Rosambo) and Pa (Jacqueline d'Halluin); do make it clear that you are pursuing your studies with a view to priesthood and that your priestly vocation is stronger than ever'.

In 1954, Jean Vanier began the ordination process by contacting the archbishop of Quebec. This showed his wish not to be incardinated in France, so as to avoid coming under the authority of a bishop who could find out about Eau Vive.

In May 1956, he was certain of his imminent ordination. But following Thomas Philippe's trial, the Holy Office opposed it, demanding several years' seminary training so as to 'detoxify' him from his attachment to his 'master' and to make him understand that a priest is at the service of the universal Church and not of a closed circle.

This came as a severe shock. In December 1956, Jean Vanier decided to put his plans for priestly ordination on hold. His choice was motivated by his 'absolute' loyalty to Thomas Philippe. His 'expectation' of knowing 'what Jesus would ask of (him)' got mixed up with his expectation of his master's 'liberation'.

He devoted eight years to this expectation. To his parents and friends who questioned him, he repeated his need to 'pray in solitude' so as to listen to what Jesus wanted from him. The Commission has been able to stitch together his itinerary during those eight years; his periods of solitude and stability hardly ever lasted more than two months at a time. In his correspondence, Thomas Philippe devoted long passages to suggestions about what he should say to stall his parents and reassure them about his vocation. To protect his own secrets, Thomas Philippe advised his disciple to do his utmost to prevent his parents - worried about their son's precarious way of life - from seeking advice from other religious or clergy about his vocation. Thomas Philippe advised Jean to pursue a career that could serve 'as a screen to conceal his hidden and solitary life'.

Archival research has revealed the stratagems used by Thomas Philippe and his disciple to try to mitigate the sanctions and enable them to resume their public contact. Their shared conviction was that the 'graces' they enjoyed were superior to anything else in the Church, including an unsuccessful approach to Pope John XXIII, whom 'the Good Lord does not enlighten'. Informed by Fr Paul Philippe, John XXIII asked Jean Vanier to 'leave Fr Thomas', something that Jean Vanier was not able to do. He would later write: 'I left with a wounded heart, but peaceful inside. I knew I was too strongly linked to Jesus through Fr Thomas to leave him. (...) I could only leave him by being unfaithful to Jesus and to what He was wanting from me'.

To make him accept this sacrifice, Thomas Philippe promised him immediate access to 'exceptional mystical graces' and to a degree of 'mystical illumination' close to his own, from which flow the missions that Jean would carry out for him in the 'hidden life'. The first of these was to make up for his absence from the 'tout-petits', i.e. the 'initiated' women: Jacqueline d'Halluin, Anne de Rosambo, plus a few other women who joined them as of autumn 1959. 'They (Jesus and Mary) alws. make me very strongly feel how plsed. they are with you, with the sacrifice of your priesthood that you have spontaneously, freely, offered them – for the moment at least – as a testimony of faith in these mystical graces and in the interior call of the Holy Spirit; more and more, they are putting in place a deep, intimate, union betwn. us. I feel so strongly that they unite me to you more intimately than to my brother priests or religious and a fortiori to my natural brothers, specifically because of your sacrifice, which gives you a special place in Their Hearts. You have become one with me and the (illegible word) tout-petits, bec. y. have accepted not to have any personal life, any apostolate, to be Jesus' tt. petit servant'.

In letter after letter of Jean Vanier's correspondence, the same elements were repeated: an account of his littleness and abandonment into God's hands, the sacrifice, the hidden and solitary life, his rejection of the world and denunciation of the 'pride' which was ready to pounce on those holding public roles in the world and in the Church. He acquired some of the functions of the priest, especially that of spiritual accompaniment and guidance. From his master, he learned how to make use of charisma, laying the foundations for a spiritual authority that is based on a direct relationship with the divine.

With the development of L'Arche, Jean Vanier successfully developed his work as both preacher and spiritual writer. He gave many retreats and talks in France and North America. This encouraged him, in January 1975, to renew his request to be ordained, without going through a seminary. He was encouraged in this by Bishop Stéphane Desmazières who, since becoming bishop of Beauvais, Noyon and Senlis in 1965, had become attached to the new community and gave it his unwavering support. 'Jesus' was the only source called upon by Jean Vanier to confirm his vocation to serve the Church through L'Arche.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith again stepped in to oppose this, concerned by Jean Vanier's desire to be ordained exclusively for L'Arche rather than for the Church. This refusal also came from Fr Paul Philippe, now a cardinal. He hadn't forgotten the condemnations issued in the 1950s. He named the risk of the disciple pursuing his spiritual father's work, including the latter's sexual practices. (In his initial application, Jean Vanier had written that if ordained, it would be to help Thomas Philippe in Trosly-Breuil). 'In relation to this question, it is our duty to respond with the utmost clarity: whether at L'Arche or at Eau Vive, no charge has ever been laid against Jean Vanier as to chastity. A fear however remains: if it were the case that he had been 'initiated' by Fr Thomas Philippe into his erotico-mystical theories, will he not be led, one day, to put them into practice in his own life, as his spiritual father believed he could, or rather should, having been urged - as he said - by the Holy Spirit? Let us hope not'.

For Jean Vanier, whose loyalty to Thomas Philippe since 1952 had taken precedence over fidelity to the Church, this refusal put a definitive end to a desire he had been carrying for 25 years. One hypothesis is that being prevented from becoming a priest shaped Jean Vanier's complex and ambivalent relationship with the Church and also contributed to shaping his very 'free' style of preaching and speaking on spirituality. In a letter in 1991 to a female friend, he recalls the refusal of his request for ordination, writing that he had given up 'wasting time reforming the Church' and announced his wish 'to try to be Church wherever he is'.

CHAPTER 4

Philosopher and theologian

Fifteen years of Jean Vanier's life were spent studying philosophy and theology. He was very strongly influenced by Thomas Philippe, notably his slanted interpretations of Teresa of Avila, Thomas Aquinas among others.

Before his doctorate, from 1950 to 1956, Jean Vanier followed a philosophical curriculum that was rather disjointed as far as institutions were concerned, but fairly unified in spirit around a few classical authors (Aristotle, saint Thomas Aquinas, Cajetan, Jean-de-Saint-Thomas). He began his philosophy and theology studies at Eau Vive and Le Saulchoir before moving on to the Institut Catholique de Paris.

It is interesting to note how he used philosophy as a screen to conceal the 1956 canonical sanctions: according to him, it was the philosophical school of Eau Vive that was the 'tendency that must be crushed'. It was for 'doctrinal' and not for disciplinary or moral reasons that Thomas Philippe had been deposed.

On several occasions, in order to avoid the sanctions imposed by the Church authorities and defend Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier called upon a few well-known spiritual authors and philosophers. The most striking example was by erroneously and fallaciously twisting a passage from saint Teresa of Avila about 'disobeying her director in order to obey a revelation' and justify disobedience; or again he referred to Cardinal Cajetan, a famous commentator on saint Thomas Aquinas, who suggested that it may be possible for a priest who is the object of 'unfair excommunication' to 'say mass secretly'.

As regards his PhD project, this was put together in dialogue with Thomas Philippe, his spiritual master and 'master on the level of intelligence', Marie-Dominique Philippe- at that point a philosophy professor at the University of Fribourg- as well as with Fr Lallemand, a professor at the Institut Catholique de Paris and a great supporter of Eau Vive, who would be the supervisor for his thesis. Its title was 'Le bonheur, principe et fin de la morale aristotélicienne' (Happiness as the principle and aim of Aristotle's ethics). It was defended in 1962 and published in February 1965.

For Jean Vanier, his PhD in moral philosophy came as a lifeline after the failure of his application for the priesthood: in a sense, it was an alibi. Rather cynically, Thomas Philippe actually proposed this 'thesis in ethics' as 'a screen'. It must be noted that, despite the important part played by the latter in this thesis, his name did not appear on the usual list of people thanked, a sign that the links between the two men still had to be concealed.

Essentially, in Jean Vanier's theological-philosophical reflections, several diverse elements are present. There is, on the one hand, the influence of Aristotelian philosophy and the ethics of happiness; on the other hand, there is an interpretation of saint Paul's thought on the moral life under the Spirit. These two elements do not tie up in the same way with his actual behavior, but two theses may be delineated: Aristotle's philosophy did not prevent Jean Vanier's deviance and could even have encouraged it; one can also observe a theological justification of certain deviations based on a twisted interpretation of a life under the Spirit which would be 'above' the moral law.

So, in defending his thesis on Aristotle's moral philosophy, Jean Vanier summed up his views: moral perfection does not subsist in 'acquisition', not even in the acquisition of virtues, but only in the person's alignment with God. What is missing here is a means of verifying this alignment by acquiring and practising virtues. When it is not balanced by the presence of an objective norm, the 'morality of happiness' may actually cease to play a role as a compass for guiding one's actions. And when the thesis was published, Jean Vanier concluded his work by raising the question of what constitutes, for the Christian, the essential balance between rational free will and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For him, Christian morality did not seem to rest so much on philosophy and reason as on faith and mysticism alone. This left the way open to a mystical morality without any counterweight via a consideration of morality at the level of natural reason. Contradicting Thomas Aquinas, Jean Vanier thus hypothetically suggested the theoretical possibility of

Christian mysticism with no reason-based morality: instead Christian morality would be essentially founded on mysticism.

The Commission was able to learn of a fragment that was cut out of the official conclusion of Jean Vanier's thesis. This text develops the notion of two distinct moralities, that of the 'ordinary way', a way of piety and obedience to the Church based primarily on reason, and that of the 'narrow way' of those who renounce the world: the 'mystics and saints' whom 'the Holy Spirit reserves for himself in a very special way' in the service of 'God's good pleasure'.

Here we can easily perceive the risk of a morality that relies exclusively on the 'divine will', which is arbitrary and very difficult to discern.

According to these formulations present in Jean Vanier's thesis and in this excised fragment, there would have been nothing to prevent the sexual relations that Thomas Philippe's disciples had with one another: Thomas Philippe had 'received' a 'private revelation', and this revelation was 'verified' by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For it was those gifts, rather than reason that were the basis of morality. This resolved the question of the 'morality' of the acts they committed.

CHAPTER 5

The saint and the star

For decades, in the Catholic organizations close to L'Arche and in the media, Jean Vanier appeared as the living embodiment of the Gospel, the star layperson of the Catholic renewal under the pontificate of John-Paul II.

His was a charisma of gentleness, peace, tenderness and charity, of attention paid to people with a disability, an eloquence that touched hearts, of support for people on their way to God and inner liberation, of service to the poorest, the weakest, the outcasts. When Jean Vanier died, his death was marked with an outpouring of praise throughout the world, creating a feeling that he was being canonized by the media.

Nevertheless, it was the work of L'Arche that got Jean Vanier media attention and ensured publicity, not the reverse. Thus, one of the first awards he received, in 1973, was given to him for his work, 'for actions carried out in support of disabled people all over the world'. He was made into a living saint because of L'Arche, which he had founded.

Jean Vanier's family desired holiness and expressed this desire in their private correspondence: any life-decision must be a 'call from God'; any success in exams is the sign of 'special protection' by Providence; they regard their close friends, children, parents, and spiritual parents as 'saints'. In addition to his parents' early description of him to their circle as an apostle, a friend of God', many people who met Jean Vanier said how struck they were by his godly bearing. Among Thomas Philippe's admirers, the filiation of Jean Vanier with this 'living saint' reinforced the conviction that he had been chosen by God.

The group of Eau Vive continually proclaimed the saintly reputation of Thomas Philippe – a saint wrongly accused by Rome. For more than 60 years, from 1952 until 2015, this interpretation was defended: Fr Thomas is a saintly priest who has been slandered. In his public letter of May 2015, following the revelation of the abuses committed by his spiritual father, Jean Vanier again refused to 'judge Fr Thomas' and yet again repeated how, for him, the latter had been 'an instrument of God', a 'man of God who led him to Jesus'.

It is a pity that the reflections noted by Jacques Maritain in his diary did not come to light earlier: 'In my opinion, Fr Thomas is mad. Fr Marie-Dominique knows the facts and says that since his brother is a saint, everything is OK. Another madman. The devil is raging in this incredible affair', or again: 'Charles Journet and Fr Paul Philippe (from the Holy Office) are definitely enlightening me about Fr Thomas' story. For me this is an extraordinary case of schizophrenia – too rich a wine (a sincere thirst for holiness, etc.) in a double-bottomed wineskin, whose rottenness has turned everything into perversion.'

Thomas Philippe's and Jean Vanier's saintly reputations prevented the victims from speaking out. That served as a convenient screen for the abusers. For Jean Vanier it became a means of seduction.

Part 2

The 'Secrets of the mystical sect' Continuity and transmission from Eau Vive to L'Arche

The purposes of Eau Vive and L'Arche, and the people they served were poles apart. But in the background, the human network and some elements of the culture passed from one to the other.

As early as June 1964, Jean Vanier wrote to his parents: 'Raymond has come to Trosly with me. He can tell you about the projects of L'Arche, for such is the name of the work...Noah's Ark that takes on board all the little animals to save them and floats (but not a word to the Holy Office!) on Eau Vive! It is also the Ark of the Covenant: Mary, Mater Misericordiae opening her arms to all the wretched of the world.'

From Eau Vive to L'Arche, the continuity was secretly guaranteed by a nucleus of men and women with a shared conviction about a new divine mystery, requiring them to keep silent on their sexual practices. The Commission considers it valid to describe the group as a 'sect' for this is what it was: it had its clergy, clerics or lay people like Jean Vanier; it had its rites, such as praying on someone else's heart; it had its specific dogmas, its private prophecies and 'Marian maximalism', etc. Moreover, this sect was hidden within an institution at the heart of the Church. And even if the sect at Eau Vive was no longer quite the same as the one founding L'Arche, the nucleus did remain the same. The events of the years 1956-1964 intensified the underground culture, solidified Thomas Philippe's argumentation and led them to overvalue the concept of spiritual and intellectual poverty.

Fr Paul Philippe referred to it as a 'sect', calling it 'mystical' - 'seta mistica'. In a 1977 report addressed to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he wrote: 'At Eau Vive, the female initiates were bound by oath to keep the secrets of the mystical sect, even from their confessors. Similarly, when Jean Vanier was made Fr Thomas Philippe's 'successor', he would certainly have sworn never to speak, never at any cost.'

CHAPTER 6

Private correspondence

The archives consulted contain about 1400 letters, either written by Jean Vanier ('active correspondence') or received by him ('passive correspondence'), which can all be described as 'private' letters. Among them, a subset of some 340 letters was found in a file entitled 'NFA' (Not For All), consisting mainly of letters from Thomas Philippe, Jacqueline d'Halluin and Anne de Rosambo.

For a historian, the analysis of private letters is of the essence, while knowing that the correspondence is fragmentary, allusive, and sometimes opaque. Interpreting this correspondence can be difficult. While it would be wrong to impose a sexual meaning on each expression of tenderness in the correspondence, one must not go too far in the other direction: to only see evangelical gentleness in some ambiguous phrases would amount to a form of pious naïveté.

Jean Vanier obviously aroused passion among the women writing to him. One can observe a wealth of spiritually ambiguous letters on the borderline between the carnal and the spiritual. Amorous writing became a rewriting of the liturgical mystery, where Biblical phrases were included and used ambiguously as a sub-text.

For instance, the letters between Jean Vanier and Mother Marguerite-Marie (1904-1984), the Superior of the Little Sisters of the Virgin in Thomery (Seine-et-Marne) show Thomas Philippe's influence on Jean Vanier's writing, allowing one to observe Jean Vanier's dissemination of the doctrines of Thomas Philippe. Using mystical language, they express a theology of loving union. 'The love of Jesus' becomes the basis of morality; the nun is invited to give up her intelligence in favor of a religion of love. Ambiguity is carefully cultivated. The vocabulary used is spiritualized. The relationship between 'hearts of flesh' is referred to as a 'little retreat'; it is evoked by the image of 'diving into divine Love'. The terms employed suggest that the relationship goes far beyond a strict spiritual friendship. They wish to meet up 'at night'. They seek 'tranquility' and a form of solitude between the two of them. Jean Vanier invites the nun to come and see him in Paris, in his little room, because the place will be 'tranquil'. The Convent becomes 'a nest of love', 'an oasis of love'.

A web of carnal terms was being built up, letter by letter. Jean Vanier and the nun are 'united' (in prayer) and 'in very deep union' (in the heart of Jesus), they 'penetrate' (the mysteries through Love), they are hidden in the bosom' (of the Immaculate one), they must 'sink into' (the heart of God), seek the 'good pleasure' (of God). In their correspondence the word 'pleasure' (God's or Mary's) and the phrase 'have a retreat together' are repeated often: it is hard to read this as if the two were simply at prayer.

Jean Vanier emphasized his poverty, his misery and his sense of being without. Through saying he is 'broken', the 'brokenness' became a means of seduction. Similarly, the 'beauty' of the bride is her 'poverty', her 'littleness'. Love, for him, was defined as a 'blessed night of intelligence'. The invitation to give up 'speculative intelligence' was continually repeated. One must also note the absence of any feeling of guilt, since God gives himself in the relationship and 'the name of the bridegroom is mercy' – 'at the deepest point, it doesn't matter what one does, provided one does (sic) what little Jesus wishes, provided one is his little toy...'.
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Another example is Jean Vanier's exchanges with Brigitte, a married woman. With her, his expression was totally different. To help the Commission, Brigitte took the initiative to forward the letters she had received from him. Most of the correspondence dates from the years 1980-1990, but it continued until the very last years of Jean Vanier's life. Brigitte was interviewed by the Commission, so that, unlike the case of Mother Marguerite-Marie, we have, in addition to the letters themselves, oral clarifications that confirm the sexual nature of the relationship.

In this correspondence, a certain number of inhibitions have been dropped. Jean Vanier thus did not hesitate to refer to his genitals, described as 'sacred'. He speaks of the intimate union, in prayer and in the flesh, with Brigitte, whose hands, lips and breasts give rise to his 'gift of the body', the gift of 'the sacrament of love', characterized, in terms that are hardly disguised, by erection ('I am giving you my body

(...) rising for you, towards you, turning towards you') and the emission of seed ('This thirst for love (...) bursts out towards you and in you').

Conceptualizing natural relationships as 'a sacrament of divine love' was a very 'Philippian' theme. In line with the pattern already seen in the correspondence with Marguerite-Marie or with Catarina, another correspondent, one notices a spiritualization of the relationship and the frequent use of Biblical references. The sexual relationship became 'a sacrament'. 'The bridegroom's tenderness', 'the bridegroom's fire', 'the wedding night', 'the marriage' keep cropping up in explicit terms.

CHAPTER 7

Men and women in the sect's dynamics

Eau Vive and the founding group of L'Arche would never have been able to function without the personal commitment of female initiates, some of whom were very rich.

The Holy Office investigation established that five convents of nuns were involved in Thomas Philippe's mystical-sexual practices. There were many exchanges between those convents and Eau Vive, with some young women staying at the students' hall while discerning their religious vocation while others, by contrast, left their convent to join Eau Vive.

The testimonies gathered by the Holy Office investigation allow us to establish that Thomas Philippe drew quite a few women into his mystical-sexual practices. His was a well-oiled operation, hiding his trysts with the nuns or laywomen from the rest of the community and from visitors. He met the women he 'counseled' in his own room or in the young women's rooms. There, he shared the 'graces' he had received. In her statement to the Holy Office, one of the women reported: 'We believed we were being confirmed in grace. We could no longer sin as regards purity thanks to being specially chosen by the M(ost) H(oly) Virgin, who had revealed to us the secret of her own life and of her own intimacy with O(ur) L(ord). We were already living with the Father and among ourselves what we would be living in the celestial city: the carnal union of Jesus and Mary will be at the center of the celestial city in place of the Cross. We were believing in the end of the world'.

In a report dated March 1977, Fr Paul Philippe wrote that the other women initiates used to call Anne de Rosambo 'the queen' or 'the bride'. This central role explains why she was removed early on from Eau Vive, following the first statements. It was also perhaps to stay at a prudent distance, but not too far from the community (28 km) that she settled in a little villa at Villebon-sur-Yvette, which she called Loc Maria (Mary's place in Breton). Together with her apartments in Paris, this would become one of the meeting places for the 'tout-petits' until the founding of L'Arche.

Central to the group was a man perceived to be an extension of Christ. From the moment Thomas Philippe was removed in 1952, he assigned to Jean Vanier, his disciple, the 'divine' mission of replacing him at Eau Vive, especially as protector of 'the initiated'. In the master's absence, Vanier thus became the male reference of the group.

Anne de Rosambo's and Jacqueline d'Halluin's letters reveal that their relationships with Jean Vanier were not at the same level.

Some letters show Jacqueline d'Halluin's intimate knowledge of Jean Vanier's personality. She gently admonished him, for instance, in a long letter on humility in which she invited him to seek less for virtue in order to better find it. In other letters, what flourishes was a courtship love. One occasionally has the feeling that one is reading the correspondence between two young lovers: 'I am saying good-bye with a holy kiss', 'I am kissing you quite divinely'. Jean Vanier sometimes sent flowers or parcels. She sometimes sent him 'locks of hair' 'to put here and there in your room... for the pleasure of finding them'. Their love was also carnal. Jacqueline d'Halluin referred to their nights spent together, the love beds and the drawn curtains.

Like Jacqueline d'Halluin, Anne de Rosambo used the term ' pussycats ' to refer both to herself and Jean Vanier. The relationship, however, appeared less passionate than with Jacqueline d'Halluin. Her longer term ties with Thomas Philippe gave her an almost maternal role with Jean Vanier. The two of them agreed to limit their written proofs of closeness and affection. The intimacy expressed in their letters was not the exact reflection of their relationship. They spent long moments together. In February 1959, as Jean Vanier was recovering from hepatitis in Torbel in Switzerland, she came to visit him and spent almost a month with him. That same year, she joined him a second time for a long stay alone with him in Fatima. A note from 1961 reveals their intimacy despite the rule they had fixed for themselves: 'Pussycat dear, I'll write again tomorrow. I hope everything is fine. On Tuesday night, eventually, I'll manage to be at v. cha. (Villa

Chanez) to take advtge of a qut. litl. puss all hot with spiritual things as soon as he arrives.' (Jean Vanier was coming back from Rome, where he had seen Thomas Philippe.)

In the words of Jean Vanier himself, what brought together these two women and himself were the occasions which they could spend, two or three at a time, with Thomas Philippe. Since the Holy Office had strictly forbidden the latter to see his 'initiated' women or Jean Vanier again, these meetings were clandestine. They generally took place in Rome, or in Bouvines when Thomas Philippe returned there in summer to see his parents. It is difficult to give an exact count of those meetings, which occurred between two and six times a year. They were less frequent during his stay at the Trappist monastery in Frattochie (1956-1959) and took the form of fleeting encounters in the agricultural countryside surrounding the monastery. One letter, however, shows that at least once during that period, Thomas Philippe advised them to choose a hotel close to the monastery, which must be 'big enough for there to be many comings and goings so that the people entering and leaving would be less noticeable'. To disguise himself, he asked Jean Vanier to prepare 'overalls, such as the ones worn by mechanics or motorcyclists' which should be 'ample enough to be worn, if need be, over the robe', as well as 'a leather balaclava that they (motorcyclists) sometimes wear to protect themselves from the wind'; As to preparing the 'little ones' (the women), he recommended that they 'rest as much as possible to be ttly. at Jesus' disposal'.

In a letter from 1957, Thomas Philippe asked Jean Vanier to examine carefully the 'effects' of their prayer together. It seems that there is a desire to seek proof of the authenticity of these 'extraordinary graces' lived together. In another letter, from the beginning of 1958, he insists on the exceptional character of the spiritual experience of the 'tout-petits'. It seems clear that he is referring to the mystical-sexual 'graces' that unite the group. The 'tout-petits' will have to wait in silence till the persons of the Trinity express 'all their pleasures of love'. This may possibly refer to times of collective sexualized 'prayer' which we know to have existed at the beginning of Eau Vive through a statement given to the Holy Office.

July 1959 seems to have been the starting point for a widening of the group. Thomas Philippe's greater freedom at Santa-Sabina seems to have galvanized their energy to renew contact with former women residents of Eau Vive and to 'initiate' new ones. From the summer of 1960, Jean Vanier rented a flat in Rome, which, in a letter to Thomas Philippe, he introduced as a 'refuge' that 'appears to be even holier than a Convent, a true house of Nazareth, a true house of pleasure'.

If the sexual aspect only emerges at rare moments in those exchanges of letters among the 'tout-petits', what is described is a corruption of Christian spirituality and prayer, with graces reserved to a select group, the necessity of collective intimacy in prayer, and the disappearance of the ego and personal identity in favor of total passivity to receive the 'instructions' of the Spirit.

This practice of sexualized prayer exchanged with different 'partners' did not prevent the emergence of personal attachments. This was a clearly expressed desire in Jacqueline d'Halluin's letters, but which could not be fulfilled, since the mystical-sexual practices of the 'tout-petits' were not exclusive. The relationship was not patterned on marital, exclusive love. It is considered to be 'supernatural' in essence and therefore implied both celibacy and a multiplicity of partners. But this did not stop Jacqueline d'Halluin from expressing her suffering in front of such a situation: 'It is true to say that the more one loves, the more one suffers. But is it my fault if Mary gave me so many b. (bridegrooms)? One's heart is really entirely given to each of them and suffers for each as if he were the only one (...) How can we salt the earth, if not with our tears? Is this not the only salt that we have?'

On the eve of the founding of L'Arche, the group of the 'tout-petits' had recovered a certain dynamism and had managed, against the will of Rome, to secretly maintain strong links, by carrying on their mystical-sexual practices and had even initiated new participants. In its report, the Commission recounts many epistolary testimonies that attest to this.

As early as 1963, Thomas Philippe's return to France enabled the 'initiated' to consider gathering again shortly. The founding of L'Arche (the name, put forward by Jacqueline d'Halluin, was chosen in May 1964) was first of all the result of this desire to come together. For them, Thomas Philippe's 'liberation' heralded the return of the happy days that they had been hoping for since 1956.

Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier and Dr Préaut had been constantly in touch since Eau Vive was closed down. The psychiatrist, who was heading an institution in Longueuil-Annel, offered Thomas Philippe a solution that corresponded to his wishes and those of the group around him.

The first home of L'Arche opened on 5 August 1964 with the welcome of Raphaël Simi and Philippe Seux, as well as a third person who was taken back to hospital the very next morning. The foundation quickly mustered the help of persons outside the circle of Eau Vive. Oral and written accounts from witnesses of those days provide an overview of the presence of the 'tout-petits' at L'Arche in those first years and distinguish two types of presence: the women who had an active role in L'Arche and those who came primarily to be with Thomas Philippe again. The correspondence definitely shows that the specific relationships that existed before 1954 were still wrapped in secrecy in the 1980s for the members of L'Arche who had no idea of their dynamics. It should be noted that the place of these women, especially Jacqueline d'Halluin and Anne de Rosambo, is not mentioned in Jean Vanier's authorized biographies. But in documents meant for a more limited diffusion, Jean Vanier repeatedly emphasized the importance of Jacqueline d'Halluin, and gave her an honored and memorable role in the founding process.

The success of the community rendered this initial sectarian nucleus just one element among others. It will however have left its mark on L'Arche through its spiritual influence and its conception of the human person and poverty. The diversification of recruitment networks allowed for the arrival of people from varied backgrounds, and communities were founded in North America and India in contexts very different from that of the Trosly community.

CHAPTER 8

Jean Vanier, Carmel and L'Arche

Jean Vanier's links with the Carmelite order continued a tradition dating back to his maternal grandmother, Thérèse de Salaberry Archer, 'Ganna', whose spiritual director, Fr Almire Pichon, SJ, had also been the spiritual director of part of the Martin family, including its most famous member, saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Almire Pichon also counseled Pauline Vanier who, once married to Georges, expanded her contacts with Carmelite nuns in England, Canada and France.

Through Thomas Philippe at the end of the 1940s, Jean Vanier's parents and eventually Jean himself came into contact with the Carmelite convent in Nogent and formed strong links with the prioress, Mother Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus. It was in that Carmel that Thomas Philippe's deviant behavior was first identified.

The sources presented in the Commission report reveal that at least six nuns of the Nogent community, including the prioress, joined Thomas Philippe in his mystical-sexual practices, and that three of them persisted in 'keeping the spirit of it' at the conclusion of his trial. They also show the special place that this community seemed to occupy for the Dehau-Philippe 'spiritual dynasty'. It appears that Jean Vanier's parents chose to remain faithful to the friends they had made there, whether out of ignorance of the serious events that had taken place at the Nogent Carmel, or because they did know but could not believe them or understand their exact extent. Caught up in the same system of beliefs, Jean Vanier maintained to the end of his life that Mother Thérèse had been unjustly persecuted.

From the very first months of the foundation of L'Arche, strong links were forged between the Abbeville Carmel and the first assistants at Trosly. The second community founded in France, La Merci, was located in the vicinity of Cognac with the support of the prioress of the local Carmel. Shortly thereafter, the Ambleteuse community was founded, this time with the support of the Abbeville Carmel.

Many connections were established between the Carmelites and the new communities, spiritual and occasionally material, some of which have lasted up to this day. The Abbeville Carmel supported the first communities of L'Arche and their members, and they in return received several new vocations of young women. The records of the sisters of the Abbeville Carmel in the 1970s and 1980s – the Carmel closed down in 1998 – show that their few novices had either been members of L'Arche or close to it.

With the Cognac Carmel, a number of elements attest to the fact that the Carmel and its prioress established close and long-term links with Marie-Dominique Philippe and Jean Vanier and also with the communities the two men had founded: L'Arche and the Brothers of St Jean each established a foundation in the vicinity of the Carmel. The first visit by the two men with Jacqueline d'Halluin dates back to the summer of 1959. The retreats preached by the Dominican in Cognac for over 40 years were often based on the Song of Songs. In his turn, Jean Vanier also became one of the community's regular preachers.

The Commission was able to have access to a few of the letters addressed to Jean Vanier by three Carmelite nuns. Two of them passed through the Nogent Carmel before being moved to other Carmelite communities. (Marie-Madeleine Wamberghe, a cousin of Thomas Philippe, went to Abbeville). The third became prioress of the Cognac Carmel in 1964.

These letters reveal a deluded Christology, in which Jean Vanier becomes Christ and bridegroom. Some of them are presented as passionate love letters. They are letters addressed by women to a man; the liveliest of them move seamlessly from mysticism to eroticism; they quote passages from the Bible while distorting them. Within the methodological framework of the historical research, the Commission decided to publish large excerpts from these letters in its report, since they demonstrate very clearly great mental and theological confusion, and point to serious breaches of the Carmelite rule. Thus a letter from M.-M. Wamberghe in 1966: 'M.t.a. (Mon très aimé = My most beloved), I am giving you everything: yesterday evening, during the talk by Fr H. which was very complex, Jesus absorbed me totally, glued to Ton c. d'Ép. (Ton coeur d'époux = your bridegroom's heart). I was intoxicated with all the substance of Love and life and this morning I totally surrendered myself, as if you were here. Oh yes! I pass into You and You pass into

me and there is only a single flame that rises straight up to the Father, all light and pure; o my beloved, do come and inflame your little poor one more and more’.

What is striking is the existence of two parallel narratives: the official one is that of a beautiful synergy between contemplative nuns, apostolic clerics and lay people; the other, hidden, is that of misguided vocations. The checks and balances were not functioning. The principle that certain nuns had been specially chosen, as put forward by the Philippe brothers, made transgression desirable. For a long time, the nuns maintained a double life, which forced them into tiring exercises in dissimulation. It was good for the legitimacy of L’Arche and the Brothers of St Jean to be able to avail themselves of the support and prayer of the Carmels. It was also good to be able to offer such places to lay people for a time of renewal. In a sense, Jean Vanier as well as the Philippe brothers had a vested interest in ensuring that these women remained Carmelites.

CHAPTER 9

Jean Vanier and Marie-Dominique Philippe (1950-1976)

Jean Vanier and Marie-Dominique Philippe first met in autumn 1950 at Eau Vive, where the latter was invited to teach and where he was spiritual guide to a certain number of young women. They were sixteen years apart in age. Their links were extremely close and involved the Vanier and the Philippe families in the broader sense. These links were reinforced at the very moment when Thomas Philippe was condemned and Eau Vive was closed down. **These links were centered on intellectual and spiritual direction, and are part of a common history.**

The year of Thomas Philippe's condemnation, 1956, was also the year when Jean Vanier witnessed the last moments of Fr Dehau and met the parents of the Philippe brothers in Bouvines. It was also the year when the Vanier parents met Marie-Dominique Philippe. Of the letters discovered from Marie-Dominique Philippe to Jean Vanier, the last dates from 1976. However, that was definitely not the end of the story since on several later occasions Marie-Dominique Philippe gave retreats for L'Arche assistants. But it is clear that, after 1976, the year of the foundation of the Brothers of St Jean, the links between Marie-Dominique Philippe and L'Arche became less close – without any apparent tension – and more institutional.

The relationship between the two Philippe brothers is not easy to grasp. Between 1957 and 1962, the two naturally met and exchanged letters. Marie-Dominique Philippe went to Italy several times to meet his elder brother who also happened to be his godfather. One observes his stubborn defense of Thomas for the sake of family ties. What is also visible in Thomas Philippe's letters to Jean Vanier is a paradoxical invitation to trust and to be prudent with regard to Marie-Dominique. Incidentally, the latter was not part of the first circle of 'tout-petits' even though we know that he too was sanctioned in February 1957, following his brother's condemnation, for having covered up the latter's actions. But there is a strong suspicion that he too engaged in mystical-sexual relationships with nuns. He was no longer allowed to hear confession, give spiritual direction or teach on anything to do with spirituality. But Marie-Dominique Philippe very cleverly got round the sentence, for not only did his condemnation remain secret, but at the request of the Master of the Order, the penalty was commuted. He was fully rehabilitated (but not absolved) in June 1959, thanks to an act of mercy on the part of the Holy Office, which urged him henceforth to lead a 'truly priestly life'.

In relation to spiritual direction, it appears that Marie-Dominique Philippe advised Jean Vanier at least twice, in 1956 and 1976, to remain with Thomas Philippe and that he should not be incardinated into the diocese of Quebec and not go through lengthy seminary training, in order to remain at L'Arche.

The documents that are both the most complex and the most precise are Jacqueline d'Halluin's letters. Reading these letters, we see that she shared the 'graces' given by Mary and Jesus with her three 'little pussycats', Thomas Philippe, his brother and Jean Vanier, but on that point, the letters between the three men are silent.

Part 3

Authority and governance in L'Arche

This part examines Jean Vanier's impact on L'Arche in terms of governance and the exercise of authority. It explores whether this could have encouraged forms of control and abuse.

The Commission recognises that from the point of view of the humanities and social sciences, authority is neither an attribute nor an individual skill, but rather, a relational register. Jean Vanier's main form of authority was charismatic. We examine several facets, in particular, the virtues and personal gifts attributed to the holder of authority by those who consent to it, as well as the affective and emotional bond that unites them. But we cannot reduce this charismatic authority only to 'prophet-ism' and emotion; we also take into account the social and institutional mechanisms that authorized, framed and shaped Jean Vanier's charismatic authority.

The Commission also paid particular attention to the use of persuasion – a mode of conversation used to obtain the consent of others. The absence of an expression of disagreement or the passive implementation of a decision made by the authority holder does not necessarily imply a lucid decision on the part of the person obeying; any relationship of authority has the potential for domination, opening the way to many kinds of abuses. The possibility of this happening is increased when authority takes a 'charismatic' form, without checks and balances.

CHAPTER 10

L'Arche, an ambitious project

In the context of the 1960s, many utopian initiatives emerged, breaking away from a society considered to be conservative and too consumerist. The experience of L'Arche was based on three types of utopias. A Catholic utopia: people coming to Trosly in the hope of leading a Catholic life and the vision of an evangelical reversal of social hierarchies. A community utopia: people driven by strong social critique and a desire for radicalism, particularly in terms of shared life and the pooling of salaries. And finally, a medical-psychological utopia, where psychiatrists and medical or medical-social professionals denounced the confinement of people with psychiatric or mental disabilities and proposed innovative methods of care and inclusion.

Despite their heterogeneity, these three types of utopian motivations came together to shape the project of the community of Trosly. The intersection of these utopias created a counter-cultural communal way of life which recognised people with disabilities as people of equal dignity, or even of superior value on the spiritual level, as formulated in the writings of Thomas Philippe and taken up by Jean Vanier and others. Their point of intersection 'invented' a counter-cultural community way of life.

Information found in the archives has enabled the Commission to reconstruct the stages of the foundation of L'Arche very differently from what is recounted by the official history.

When the first home opened in 1964, in a house that Jean Vanier had just bought to live with Raphaël Simi and Philippe Seux, the legal framework for a much more ambitious project was already in place. This L'Arche home was considered, from the outset, as the first 'experimental' step in a large-scale plan. The project was supported by the Society for the Education and Protection of Deaf and Dumb Children (SIPSA), which considered it to be an annex to the Val Fleuri Centre in Trosly, opened four years earlier by Dr Préaut. Jean Vanier became a member and deputy treasurer of SIPSA at the beginning of 1964, then became its president in July 1967 – a post he held until 1986, when it changed its name (to Arche en France) and its governing statutes.

This type of support had many advantages, including the ability to receive donations and bequests and to benefit from *per diem* rates - a source of income. Jean Vanier developed links with political and administrative authorities based on the legitimacy of SIPSA. From its foundation, the profile of the L'Arche community was, for Jean Vanier, that of a service organisation connected to public welfare, intended to welcome several hundred people with disabilities. Thus, the dissemination of a founding myth designed to give meaning should not hide the keen attention paid by the founder to the conditions for the development of L'Arche. Moreover, from the outset, there was a desire to combine two intentions: to live an unprecedented and autonomous adventure founded on utopian principles, while at the same time playing the game of partnership with the public authorities, who alone were capable of giving access to the resources essential to the project's growth.

CHAPTER 11

The exercise of power

Trosly-Breuil is where it all started. It is the community to which Jean Vanier and Thomas Philippe belonged until their deaths, and also the community to which other L'Arche figures belonged. Trosly is the place where Jean Vanier invited all new people to come and discover the spirit of L'Arche, and the space from which he drew many examples for his talks and writings, which were distributed worldwide. It was also a centre for formation and a place where members of L'Arche from all over the world could come for retreats.

It was within the community of Trosly that the majority of the cases of psychological coercion and sexual abuse investigated by the Commission took place. People accused of sexual abuse were members and held positions of responsibility there, and some victims still live nearby.

The Commission decided to study the community's constitutions, which were initially influenced by the model of the constitutions of religious orders. These documents organized the governance of the group and the distribution of powers, and defined the procedures for identifying the main leaders and the modes of regulation, evaluation and control of power. They have shaped the governance of many communities in the International Federation of L'Arche.

This analysis identifies three periods.

The first period, from 1964 to 1979, was characterised by Jean Vanier holding all positions of legal, functional and symbolic authority. By the end of the 1960s, the formalisation of the project and an operational framework was needed. After some reflection with Jean Vanier, Thomas Philippe wrote a first draft which served as a blueprint for the first constitutional texts drawn up in the following years.

The frequency and duration of his stays abroad, as well as his many commitments and the development of new communities, forced Jean Vanier to delegate by defining new functions (workplace leaders, assistants, etc.). Jean Vanier alone decided on those appointed. As of July 1974, he wanted to relinquish certain managerial functions, but this would not happen before 1980. Still, the need to rethink the operational structure and the chain of command was shared, and the position of deputy director in charge of day-to-day operational aspects was created. Jean Vanier nevertheless continued to decide on everything, relying on a Community Council mainly composed of people he had appointed and on which Thomas Philippe and himself were *ex officio* members. The concern for harmonisation and consensus around the founder - the bearer of spiritual authority and executive power- was permanent.

During this period, although it was established that the community would remain open to all, a shared set of Christian values was presented as essential to be a full member of the community. Jean Vanier wrote a letter to the members of the community of Trosly in October 1976, in which he invited the 'brothers' and 'sisters' to commit themselves to 'the poorest members of our community, the most lost and in need, in order to build together a true Christian community that was open and welcoming'. This idea and formula foreshadowed 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 Pierre-qui-Vire Abbey at a retreat led by Marie-Dominique Philippe.

The second period, from 1980 to 1998, was marked by major legal and institutional changes and by the proliferation of new constitutional texts. It began in 1980 with Jean Vanier's withdrawal from the position of director of the community. Three dynamics were observed: a more complex decision-making process; a visible 'catholicisation' of the model of authority and of the community project; and the preservation of Jean Vanier's participation and control.

SIPSA was dissolved in 1986 to be officially integrated into the *Federation of L'Arche-en-France*. The original community of Trosly underwent significant changes in its operational structure, characterised by the centralization of powers in the hands of the community council, which was spiritually and practically responsible for the community. There was no external control, nor any real internal counter-power. The centralisation of decision-making and control, and the establishment of direct power relations between the

highest and the lowest level of the hierarchical organization led to the marginalization of the intermediate levels. Moreover, this led to a feeling of having to operate in an environment awash with 'unspoken' rules.

The texts relating to the governance of the community were distinguished by an increasingly assumed character of its religious identity. The constitution adopted on 29 October 1987 explicitly affirmed the religious nature of community life and authority. Thus, until the mid-1990s, the appointment of a community leader was subject to a letter of confirmation by the bishop of the diocese.

In those years, Jean Vanier maintained great influence, as shown by the legitimacy that the other members accorded to his opinion and in the preservation of privileged interpersonal relationships with him. Thomas Philippe, for his part, continued to devote himself to the spiritual leadership of *La Ferme*, where he was sole master, and to the celebration of daily mass for the whole community. He departed from Trosly in 1991. He enjoyed great respect due to his charisma, and some used to consult him for personal guidance or confession. During the 1990s, Jean Vanier's participation in the decision-making bodies of the community gradually diminished, but this did not prevent him from continuing to be involved in the process of appointing leaders. His main focus was, however, the protection of the autonomy of *La Ferme*, the place of Thomas Philippe, and the attention given to the spiritual life of the community.

In the third period, after 1998, the decision-making structure was somewhat clarified, the power of the leader was better defined and the community's governance was formally registered in an organisational chart which extended beyond the community level alone. The Federation of L'Arche in France could closely follow the running and the direction of the communities and could position itself as the frame of reference for the vision and the spirit of L'Arche. We noted the introduction of a mid-term and end-of-term process for evaluating leaders.

In the recent period, though the Catholic roots of the project remain explicit, belonging and commitment re-emerge as important questions in a de-Christianised context: the majority of the assistants in the community of Trosly are not Catholic and a growing number are without any religious belief. However, the description of the community's double mission remains strictly identical to that of the previous decades, being both a medico-social structure, approved by the public authorities, and a community integrated into the Catholic Church. The community priest remains one of the primary authority figures alongside the community leader and the deputy leader. For the first time, the constitution recognized the responsibility of the community vis-à-vis the confirmed member. This was reflected in commitments in the areas of formation, support and financial aspects such as retirement. The right to individual recourse was also instituted in the event of a serious conflict. This evolution was a sign of a lessening of the spiritualised and providential perception of commitment, where material or contractual responsibility was limited. The recognition of the responsibility of the community also indicated the end of the personal relationship between the one calling (the founder or another charismatic figure) and the one called.

For Jean Vanier, this period marked a diminishment of his official role and his presence in community government bodies. Nevertheless, he remained the founding member, who was regularly consulted and whose view and opinion still carried weight in many decisions.

The Commission found that the evolution of the exercise of power at the international level had major points of chronological convergence with these three periods of evolution at Trosly. The founder, prophet and guide, Jean Vanier, played the role of international leader during the first decade. In 1975, he announced his intention to relinquish his position as international coordinator, but in practice he still exercised a strong role of authority until the end of the 1990s. International leaders at the time mentioned how it was impossible to make an important decision without his consent and how much the trust relationship they shared with Jean Vanier was essential to the legitimisation of their position. Jean Vanier was particularly active in the development of new communities outside France, and he would sometimes ask people to found a community in a country without necessarily consulting the leaders of the Federation.

A turning point was reached in 1999 after Jean Vanier decided to let go of all international responsibilities and agreed to give more latitude to the new leaders of the Federation. In 2005, the 'Identity-Mission' process was launched despite Vanier's initial mistrust: this aimed at a collective redefinition of the values, the project and the foundations of belonging at L'Arche. This marked a key stage in the evolution of the International Federation and the communities. Jean Vanier would nevertheless remain a key figure until

the end of his life and successive international leaders strove to maintain a relationship of trust with him. Beginning in 2014, the revelations about Thomas Philippe's sexual abuse of women and the first testimonies concerning Jean Vanier kept him even more at the heart of the concerns of the international leaders.

CHAPTER 12

The authority of Jean Vanier. A sociological perspective

It is crucial to understand the way in which Jean Vanier exercised authority and how he influenced others in the exercise of their own authority at L'Arche.

Interviews with approximately 50 leaders or former leaders at L'Arche provided essential material for this analysis. Also, it allowed us to identify the nature of the *'emotional community'* that developed between these leaders and Jean Vanier. Borrowed from Max Weber, this expression designates this singular group, which is distinguished not only by the affective bond that connected these members of L'Arche to Jean Vanier, but also by the fact that it is precisely this intense bond which established the power relationships that united them.

Jean Vanier was a 'master' who 'impressed' and who was 'looked upon with great respect', he was sometimes referred to as a 'father' or as a 'brother whom we love', or - more rarely- as a 'friend'. The stories attest to the dynamics of the relationships with Jean Vanier, acknowledging his central role in the personal, professional and spiritual trajectories of the leaders at L'Arche.

Several characteristics emerge from these stories. They make it possible to identify the main reasons why Jean Vanier's authority was seen as legitimate and why he aroused so much admiration and attachment.

The first characteristic is that of the prophetic character of Jean Vanier, whose words seemed legitimate not only because of his specific rational knowledge, his capacity to transmit a conceptualised religious thought or an ethical doctrine, but because there was a shared belief in the fact that he was the bearer of a revelation, transmitting a divine message. Certain leaders at L'Arche implicitly crossed the line into believing that Jean Vanier was himself divine, in his person.

The second characteristic is that of the confident and confirming guide. At one and the same time, Jean Vanier was able to offer spiritual, personal and professional accompaniment. In the testimonies we gathered, there were no situations where Jean Vanier would have expressed a feeling of incompetence during accompaniment. While many confirmed that they had never had a decision imposed on them, in some cases, however, Jean Vanier indicated the decision to take. Members spoke of having made a personal decision relating to their love life following the advice of Jean Vanier, in order to better devote themselves to their missions at L'Arche. These relationships reinforced the feeling of being chosen, leading to a form of 'return loyalty': since he is counting on me, which I am grateful for, I must, in return, welcome and follow his opinion and advice.

The final characteristic was the clear-sightedness of the founder-leader, of his wisdom and his lucidity. Jean Vanier was supposed to have a prior knowledge in terms of defining what L'Arche is and what it should be. His capacity for work was impressive-particularly his capacity to write -the large number of retreats and conferences he gave, his non-stop travels around the world, and his ability to invest himself not only at L'Arche, but also in other related projects, such as the Faith and Light movement.

Like him, the exemplary member of L'Arche was distinguished by his own life choices - to be 'given' to the work of L'Arche and to his brothers and sisters at L'Arche, and for some people, to Christ.

Finally, if Jean Vanier's speeches, attitudes and positions were such an important reference for the leaders at L'Arche, it was also because they were sensitive to the recognition of his authority by public and religious institutions. In particular, the ecclesial legitimisation of Jean Vanier's authority was visible in many ways: oral or written messages of support from Catholic dignitaries (including Popes), the presence of Catholic priests at several L'Arche communities, and the regular presence of seminarians serving an 'internship' in the L'Arche communities.

Jean Vanier also encouraged and justified the legitimisation of this form of charismatic authority. From 1966 to 2016, he regularly taught courses which dealt explicitly with the recognition of good authority, not only at L'Arche but also outside (at conferences, retreats and in his writings). The frequent recurrence of this theme suggests its importance in his eyes: his years of teaching reveal his perennial approach over the long-term.

Jean Vanier used three figures of authority to which he gave similar characteristics: the educator, the father and the shepherd.

The authority of the educator highlights a series of human qualities and relational skills: an ability to listen, availability, support towards autonomy, educational or restorative assistance, and a concern to establish a relationship of trust. Even if the relationship of authority is one of help and support, it must be above all a relationship of friendship. The role of the leader is to be the 'confidant'; he is invited to exercise his authority over the affective, emotional and spiritual life of the people placed under his responsibility. Even though Jean Vanier sometimes mentioned the danger of fusion and coercive control, he never gave any specific examples.

The second figure is that of the father. It mainly refers to the father of a family, while occasionally borrowing from the figure of the heavenly father. The father must love, guide and challenge the child, not only because of the latter's failings, characterized by his weakness, but also by the psychological fears that turn him inwards. This relationship also responds to the aim of building up the community body, which must be experienced by its members as a family. Here Jean Vanier used the image of the parental couple to invite us to reflect on the limitations of the power of those in charge and on the sharing of authority.

The figure of the shepherd was Jean Vanier's main model of authority. The shepherd acts as a guide. According to Jean Vanier, he develops a personal relationship with each member of the flock, he shows compassion and must 'help members grow'. The figure of the shepherd is also sacrificial and is similar to that of the suffering servant of Isaiah: the shepherd must give his life in the service of the sheep. Finally, the authority of the shepherd implies a role of teaching and transmission. The shepherd is bad if, on the one hand, he does not enter into the intimate emotions of the people under his responsibility, and on the other hand he seeks order before divine intuition. The shepherd exercises spiritual authority. He must be in the image of Jesus. The scope of the shepherd's involvement in the life of those over whom he exercises his authority is very extensive: not only the interior and spiritual life of the person, but also personal and professional life choices.

Thus, Jean Vanier's discourse on authority was marked by the complete absence of any reference to existing institutional forms of authority (state, judicial, ecclesial, medical), to their tools, or to their regulations. The principles prevailing in L'Arche's mode of governance were of a spiritual order, where the holder of legitimate power received it from God, with no question of any ecclesial discernment or regulation by a third party.

The relationship of authority in which Jean Vanier formed the members of L'Arche was based on their loving, trusting and enlightened submission. This authority relationship was demonstrated by strong interpersonal relationships involving the exposure of one's inner life, through the sharing of emotions, intuitions and personal suffering.

In all their diversity, and to varying degrees, the relationships of authority at L'Arche were historically marked by this asymmetrical charismatic practice which, under certain conditions, led to abusive power dynamics.

According to Jean Vanier, the question of the limitation of the leader's power depends essentially on the leader himself: that is to say, not only on his personal openness to considering the criticisms, opinions and ideas of those around him, but also on his ability to listen to his 'little inner voice'. For members, the tools available for the validation and limitation of the shepherd's power are personal psychological attitudes (belief in oneself and in others, attentiveness to the suffering in oneself and others, listening to oneself and to others) as well as spiritual tools and approaches (prayer, attentiveness to the signs of the divine, openness to the confirmation of these signs by a partner).

In line with Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier affirmed his distrust of experts. During formation sessions on authority, he alerted those in leadership to the danger of developing a feeling of superiority. However, this statement was not accompanied by any theoretical reflection or practical examples showing how others could participate in or be represented in the exercise of decision-making and governance. Jean Vanier focused solely on the figure of the leader: the antidote to any feeling of superiority was the leader's personal effort of conversion and his attentiveness to his own vulnerability.

Their unanimous words of admiration and recognition did not prevent the majority of leaders met by the Commission from pointing out the limitations of the relationship that united them to Jean Vanier. The Commission retraces in detail a trajectory that shows the limits of a charismatic authority unregulated by legitimate checks and balances. These limits are found in the similar accounts of women and men who pointed to a dark side in their relationship with Jean Vanier.

These testimonies illustrate the different aspects of an abusive relationship of control. Several underlined their difficulties in following a personal desire or in feeling that it was legitimate to oppose Jean Vanier's intuitions, ideas, projections. The main cogs of abusive control were in place: a collective fascination for the charismatic figure and authority, an entanglement between a person's inner life, private life, professional life, and an omnipresent spiritualization, etc. Many interviews testified to the violent and destructive effects of these relationships and reported feelings of exhaustion or personal crises, which sometimes led to the person leaving the community.

The interviews also mentioned a process of breaking free, in particular by keeping one's distance from the founder. The tools of emancipation are named as institutions capable of contesting or challenging the charismatic leader's decisions or positions, contributions from a range of other people and getting spiritual support outside L'Arche. The Commission observed that several interviewees took care to confirm their loyalty to the organization and its founder, glad to have managed to distance themselves, without ever needing to break their relationship with Jean Vanier.

The accounts of the leaders interviewed showed the existence of a form of equivalence and close interweaving between three objects of belief: Jean Vanier (charismatic figure of authority); God (Jesus, friend of the poor and meek); L'Arche (organization pursuing a legitimate mission). The relationship to each one of these three parts gave meaning to the relationship with each of the other two. Was it possible to break with one without breaking with the others? Many of the Commission's interviewees spoke about this difficult question.

Have charismatic authority relationships disappeared altogether at L'Arche? Two years of investigation call for vigilance.

Part 4

Abuses at the heart of L'Arche

This part of the report directly addresses the cases of control, assault and sexual abuse in L'Arche that were brought to the attention of the Commission. The Commission defines sexual abuse as the unjust use of power of a sexual nature which causes harm to the person subjected to it. This is in line with a report from CIASE (the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church in France) which applies three criteria to identify acts of abuse:

- a power relationship: there must be proximity or dependence between the victim and the aggressor, whether familial (parent), institutional (teacher, cleric) or economic (employer). This power relationship may be superimposed on others, such as age (adult/child) or gender (male/female), etc.;
- 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;
- an absence of valid consent, resulting from the asymmetry of the relationship.

The Commission focused on the power structures within L'Arche to determine if the abuses were systemic by identifying recurring characteristic elements common to different situations involving abuse. They attempted to understand the reasons why abusive relationships involving sexual assault were able to increase and continue over time without being detected and reported. While this part of the report forms a case study of the abuses that occurred specifically within the community of Trosly-Breuil and associated family and religious networks, it aims as well to provide elements that could support comparative work in subsequent studies.

The cases entrusted to the Commission were heterogeneous as to the nature of the acts, geographical location and the way in which they were named and presented by the persons concerned. While some presented themselves as 'victims' or 'survivors' of an abusive relationship, others presented themselves as consenting partners in a transgressive relationship.

On the basis of several dozen cases of abusive relationships involving the three abusers which could be reliably documented, the Commission has described not only the main mechanisms and patterns of control through which women could be caught up in the net woven by Thomas Philippe and his most loyal disciples, but also the means by which people trapped in such situations managed to break free.

One major point is that the Commission decided to take seriously the subjectivity of the people caught in these relations blending support, affectivity, prayer, intimate gestures and sexual acts (whether they are denounced as aggressions and abuses, or described as liberating and fruitful). In other words, the Commission has faithfully recounted the subjective way these persons named and interpreted what they had experienced.

In this report, the L'Arche Study Commission has not been able to provide a precise estimate of the number of people caught up in a pattern of abuse involving a sexual act or non-consensual intimate gesture. However, the Commission became aware of twenty-five women who, at some point in their relationship with Jean Vanier, experienced a situation involving a sexual act or an intimate gesture. Among them, fourteen have been or still are members of L'Arche at the time of the enquiry. Some maintain occasional personal links with members of L'Arche. Eight of the women agreed to be interviewed by one or more members of the Commission and one by anonymous written correspondence, while five women declined the invitation.

The Commission assumes that twenty-five is lower than the actual number of women concerned.

These relationships span the period between 1952 to 2019. They cover situations starting in Eau Vive of which several continued at L'Arche.

Although the Commission's mandate primarily concerned abusive situations involving Jean Vanier, the exploration of available documents made it possible to identify twenty-three people who were sexually abused by Thomas Philippe, a small number of whom are among the thirty-three victims identified in an investigation by the Holy Office in the 1950s. Fourteen of them were or are still members of L'Arche. Among them, six women accepted to be interviewed on one or more occasions. As in the case of Jean Vanier, the knowledge acquired by the Commission makes it possible to hypothesize that the figures cited here are clearly below the number of people who had been sexually abused by Thomas Philippe.

The data collected by the Commission indicates that at least three followers of Thomas Philippe went on to sexually assault or abuse others. Among these, a woman formerly a member of L'Arche is alleged to have sexually assaulted a man while trying to initiate him into 'mystical-sexual' practices.

CHAPTER 13

Permitting the forbidden La Ferme at L'Arche

The place known as La Ferme was for a long time the location where Thomas Philippe publicly exercised his ministry. The Commission's investigation shows it to have been a place where disciples were initiated and where sexual assaults and abuses were repeatedly committed.

The constant growth in the number of members of the community in Trosly-Breuil and the strong legitimacy of Thomas Philippe's authority in the life of the community led to him being provided with a dedicated space of his own.

In September 1972, SIPSA acquired a 'stone barn with a garden, located at a place called La Ferme in Trosly-Breuil'. Jacqueline d'Halluin was responsible for the design and layout of the oratory and the chapel, which could accommodate three hundred people. A one-room apartment (both bedroom and office) was fitted out for Thomas Philippe.

La Ferme met several objectives: accommodation for passing visitors as well as for members of L'Arche, and the dissemination of Father Thomas Philippe's and Jean Vanier's writings and teachings. For L'Arche members, the first vocation of La Ferme was contemplative and centred on Eucharistic adoration. Designed as a spiritual place for psychologically fragile people, La Ferme also was the centre of religious life in the Trosly community. The chapel was consecrated on the feast of Corpus Christi – a significant choice for Jean Vanier and Jacqueline d'Halluin, being 'their private celebration' of the day of the initiation of the former by the latter.

Thomas Philippe enjoyed great autonomy, had a personal secretary and organized his own agenda consisting of religious activities and receiving visitors. Women brought him his meals every day, washed his clothes, etc. Every year, accompanied by Jacqueline d'Halluin, he went on a three-week trip to all the convents where he had sent young women.

Although his name and role were never mentioned in official documents, Thomas Philippe presented himself as the representative of the Catholic Church at L'Arche. He was not slow to compare L'Arche to other new communities, defending the superiority of L'Arche by pointing out the number of priestly and religious vocations which it had generated. He was venerated by many as a saint, and his founding 'mystical experience' was celebrated: the collective memory recalls that during the first pilgrimages to Rome, Jean Vanier led the group to pray in front of the fresco of *Mater Admirabilis*.

At La Ferme, Thomas Philippe 'led everything' with great disorganization, which complicated the role of successive leaders. He was determined to create, in his own words, 'a small presbytery at L'Arche', to bring together the young assistants preparing for the priesthood. With the help of Jean Vanier, he convinced Bishop Desmazières, then Bishop of Beauvais, that two assistants should be ordained as priests for L'Arche, including Gilbert Adam who was to succeed him as the priest in charge at La Ferme.

After Thomas Philippe's departure in 1991, a new association, called '*Association La Ferme de Trosly*' was founded on Jean Vanier's initiative. As chairman, he aimed to consolidate the place's independence and to spread the spirituality of L'Arche. The Association signed a convention of affiliation with L'Arche in France, which recognised the uniqueness of its mission. Jean Vanier always kept a close watch on La Ferme, and retained a strong influence on its future. He ensured that the spiritual legacy of Thomas Philippe was preserved and valued, as evidenced in an address to the members of La Ferme in 2002: 'Father Thomas, like the Curé of Ars, Padre Pio and other holy priests, brought together men and women who wanted to live a life of prayer and adoration and support him in his priestly ministry in order to bring as many people as possible back to God. La Ferme was the place that welcomed all 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 one of us'.

According to several testimonies, after Thomas Philippe's departure and subsequent death, Gilbert Adam sought to carry on the work of his master, borrowing his vocabulary and favourite themes. The witness statements of several leaders of La Ferme confirm the increasingly problematic nature of Gilbert Adam's presence at La Ferme. Evaluations of his terms in office in the 1990s were in fact quite negative and launched a discussion about relieving him of his role. However, in the eyes of many witnesses, he was protected by Jean Vanier and Odile Ceyrac, and remained in place until 2013, when a woman reported to the Bishop of Beauvais that Adam had coerced and sexually abused her³.

Since 2016, new leaders have been working to refound La Ferme and normalise it, in particular by negotiating the departure of Thomas Philippe's disciples and by diversifying the retreat and formation programs.

In the light of the available data, the Commission accepts the hypothesis that La Ferme showed strong similarities to Eau Vive, the most obvious being that it was centred on Thomas Philippe, who dominated both communities. Other common features include disorganisation, i.e., his reluctance, after Eau Vive, to establish clear rules which would prevent him from following the 'good pleasure' of the Holy Spirit. The contemplative dimension was a third point in common. Eau Vive was 'a contemplative and missionary home'. This aspect was also present at La Ferme, where primacy was given to prayer and adoration. Finally, Eau Vive like La Ferme was a place of conversion, generating many vocations. But it also allowed Thomas Philippe and some of his disciples to carry out sexual abuse on many occasions.

³ A report was made to the Beauvais public prosecutor, who initiated a preliminary investigation for rape of a vulnerable person, resulting in a decision to close the case 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 to gestures of affection without any sexual significance.

CHAPTER 14

Seduction

Until 2010, Jean Vanier's seduction methods seem to have a number of recurring patterns.

During a retreat or a conference, a few minutes of one-to-one discussion made young women feel personally invited into a human and spiritual adventure in Trosly, which seemed to them to 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 pretty much... there are resonances.'

Some came to Trosly through a third party and met Jean Vanier in the context of community life. Sometimes, the first meeting may have taken place in a religious community which he would visit regularly, like the Foyer de Charité of Tressaint. Jean Vanier also seems to have met some women in different, non-religious contexts.

The communal setting of L'Arche appears to have been an ideal situation for seduction, with the unwitting complicity of older members who invited people to meet Jean Vanier or Thomas Philippe individually and who spread their reputation for holiness. Being 'accompanied' was part of the ordinary life of any member of the community, as was the exercise of Catholic piety.

Life in a L'Arche community was not, however, essential for the relationship to deepen. For example, recently, one young woman left L'Arche after being an assistant and benefiting from Jean Vanier's accompaniment. The accompaniment relationship continued afterwards, and included abusive acts.

Jean Vanier always took the initiative. He was the one who, during a first and (often very) short exchange, invited his visitor to prolong the experience and often offered accompaniment, which for some led to a 'mystical-sexual' relationship. As Brigitte testified: 'An acquaintance of mine wanted me to ask Jean Vanier if he could meet him. His answer was: "Yes, but I couldn't accompany him. However, if you want me to accompany you a little bit, I could do so".'

The relationship of trust seems to have been built gradually, sometimes over several years. 'Accompaniment' most often mixed the spiritual, psychological, professional and vocational dimensions: the confusion of genres created a fertile ground for gaining a psychological control in the relationships.

The establishment of control in the relationships was all the easier because there were no real counterweights to hinder the process. While in some cases this recruitment process was effective, it did not always work. Some women, when solicited, quickly identified and refused the sexual advances made to them, which put an end to the deployment of arguments based on mystical-sexual beliefs.

When the relationship included physical touching, justified by some mystical-sexual theory, it did not need to be kept a secret, for Jean Vanier used to regularly receive many people in one-to-one meetings. Even if Jean Vanier gained women's trust primarily during meetings of personal accompaniment, it could also develop during the course of ordinary community life.

As for Thomas Philippe, during the twenty-eight years he spent at L'Arche, his seduction process always followed the same pattern, which had been remarkably unchanged since Eau Vive. He devoted a great deal of time to individual meetings, whether for counselling, spiritual direction, or for the administration of a sacrament. His influence came about through taking advantage of the sacramental rites. It was in his bedroom-office, first in Madame Gsell's house in Trosly, then at La Ferme from the 1970s, that all the people he abused went to meet him. Disciples and admirers of Thomas Philippe also invited newcomers to Trosly to meet him. A woman, identified as 'Thomas Philippe's secretary', was in charge of his agenda, and of receiving and organising meeting requests.

The Commission studied two testimonies from women who said they had had abusive relationships with Gilbert Adam. They indicated a similar manner of approach, characterized by small signs of thoughtful kindness, great attention, availability, immense gentleness and marks of affection, sometimes

including a material dimension (gifts, financial support). In the cases of Thomas Philippe and Gilbert Adam, the idealization and sacralization of the figure of the priest played a certain part.

According to the information received by the Commission, Marie-Dominique Philippe does not appear to have committed abuses directly within the framework of L'Arche. However, it has been established that he was able to maintain relationships, at the same time as his brother, with certain women living at Trosly-Breuil. A victim described the sordid way in which Marie-Dominique Philippe, whose sexual abuse she had suffered for several years, invited her to go and experience other 'mystical graces' with his brother Thomas Philippe.

In at least one case brought to the attention of the Commission, the sexual abuse by Jean Vanier was continued by a sexual assault by Thomas Philippe.

In all the documented cases examined by the Commission, the people caught in an abusive or transgressive relationship with Jean Vanier were all highly cultured adult women, without disabilities, Christians, mostly Catholic. Half of them came from privileged social backgrounds. At the time when the first mystical-sexual acts were committed, almost all of these women were young adults (20-35 years old), and were single or married or had taken religious vows.

In the case of Thomas Philippe, the profiles appear different: it can be said that the persons recruited were mostly pious young women, whose education had been marked by Catholic discipline and a taboo around sexuality.

One of the common characteristics of Thomas Philippe's victims seems to have been their psychological vulnerability, which seems to have been less often the case with Jean Vanier.

It appears that all these women were involved in an active spiritual search at the time of their abusive or transgressive relationship. The privileged attention paid to persons answering a call to a religious vocation (whether they were at the stage of discernment, had tried life in religious communities or had already taken religious vows) is a common thread in the identification and recruitment of persons caught up in these abusive or transgressive relationships.

The issue of committing oneself to celibacy for the sake of L'Arche was a key feature of dialogues with Jean Vanier. A woman who had been sexually assaulted by Thomas Philippe said she sensed that when she shared with him her feeling of being called to a religious vocation, this had triggered the physical touching by him.

CHAPTER 15

What happened?

The situations, gestures and actions were heterogeneous. Some acts of sexual assault or abuse took place within the framework of a relationship of control, others did not, as in the case of one assistant described in the report. However, it was necessary to analyse them together, insofar as they were part of a continuum of sexual violence marked by the experience of influence, abuse of authority and more generally by the confusion of spiritual, affective and sexual spheres.

From the end of the 1960s to the 2010s, the posture regularly described is that of Jean Vanier (this is also the case with Thomas Philippe and Marie-Dominique Philippe) on his knees, his head resting on the bare chest of the 'accompanied' person. Tactile gestures intensified during prayer and accompaniment (holding hands, heads close together, foreheads touching, hugging each other). The different stories evoke a similar range of touching gestures, covering in particular 'kisses on the mouth which each time were more intense, more passionate', 'voluptuous, avid', and caresses on the erogenous zones of both partners, particularly the female's breast. In several cases, the touching progressed to acts of sexual assault. Partial nudity, the absence of coitus as well as the spiritual justification of sexual abuse led Jean Vanier to consider that these were non-sexual practices.

In Trosly, the successive bedroom-offices of Jean Vanier seem to have been the usual setting. However, several testimonies have revealed that Jean Vanier had access to more discreet spaces, for example, places belonging to third parties such as Jacqueline d'Halluin's apartment. Among the more discreet places, we identified monastic locations where Jean Vanier stayed during retreats, at which he was the speaker. Meeting appointments were sometimes scheduled late at night.

The testimonies also mention abuse that took place in different countries of the world, such as Canada, or India. Judy Farquharson, who was the first to testify in 2016, said: 'In India, I went to his room, I had to cross a courtyard with snakes at night to get there. And when I think about it, I went there and I came back, I was like a servant... But there were physical caresses, gestures... and he would ejaculate, and I wondered what was going on. Which is to say, I didn't feel like there was much... I was just his helper. [...] I just thought that was how we did this Jesus and Mary thing.'

Several testimonies point to a certain dissimulative caution on Jean Vanier's part. After experiencing one of these 'special accompaniment' sessions in the room of the monastery in which he was staying, a young woman said she observed how careful Jean Vanier was to maintain a certain physical distance when they were both in the presence of the monks.

As evidenced by all the written and oral materials that the Commission has collected, several abusive accompaniments by Jean Vanier may have taken place with different women concurrently. Most relationships lasted for several years or even decades. They were always preceded by and sometimes also followed by supportive relationships without any touching or ambiguous gestures, which later became less frequent until they gradually petered out.

Because he considered these experiences as 'chaste sexuality', Jean Vanier was indifferent as to whether the woman he invited was single, or living with her boyfriend, or married or had taken the religious vow of chastity, or if she was a woman who already had an active sexual life or one who had never had any sexual experience with a partner.

The same diversity is found among the victims of Thomas Philippe. In this aspect as in others, the relationships initiated by Jean Vanier show similarities with the abuses initiated by Thomas Philippe. The Commission met a woman who had been abused by Jean Vanier and then later by Thomas Philippe. However, interviews, testimonies, and correspondence have revealed that the sexual abuses committed by Thomas Philippe differed from the ones committed by Jean Vanier in their nature, frequency, and violence. The violence of the assaults and rapes committed by Thomas Philippe caused traumatic amnesia in the case of at least two female members of L'Arche.

In the current state of knowledge accumulated by the Commission, it appears that – in addition to Jean Vanier (or Jacqueline d’Halluin by whom he had been initiated before the foundation of L’Arche) – at least two members of L’Arche (a man and a woman) reproduced the format of their master’s abusive ‘prayers’ or ‘accompaniment’. Interviews have shown that Jean Vanier and Thomas Philippe did encourage other members of L’Arche to exercise affective-sexual-spiritual practices beyond their own circle. Women and men consulted Jean Vanier and Thomas Philippe about the correctness of the hidden relationships (affective and sexual) that they had with a cleric or with a woman who had taken religious vows. The answers they received could only arouse their astonishment, even their consternation. A single person, a member of L’Arche, related this dialogue as follows: ‘I had a relationship with a Jesuit [...]. And of course, we asked ourselves: ‘But what should we do about this?’ And with all the normal questions that such a relationship entails! I spoke to Jean about it and I spoke about it to Gilbert. And their reactions were more than curious... And then I said to myself: ‘What’s going on here?’ I didn’t understand, but today I understand. [...] I was relatively close to Jean, and especially close to Gilbert. And when I told them this story, Jean’s reaction was to say... He was ecstatic. Yes, yes, he was totally in ecstasy [laughing], and he said to me: ‘But it’s so beautiful in you that the physical and the psychological should always go together!’ And I said to myself [laughing]: ‘I expected anything but not that!’

CHAPTER 16

Persuasion

'Father never used violence with me. I always acted with complete freedom, at least outwardly, because internally I was bound by the fear of displeasing the Blessed Virgin if I refused, as he always repeated to me, and also by a vow of obedience'. These lines from the testimony of a woman who denounced the acts of Thomas Philippe in 1952 **express a characteristic element of the control exercised in this system of abuse. It was not established by physical violence, but by the deployment of a moral constraint, supported by arguments resting on theological, spiritual, emotional and psychological foundations, as well as by the use of peer validation.**

The acts belonged to the same set of experiences that the abusers called 'praying together'. Jean Vanier himself, in talking about his own initiatory experience with Jacqueline d'Halluin, described it in these same words: while they 'prayed together', they would find themselves 'in each other's arms'. This relationship can be considered to have continued for several days and to have represented, in his own words, 'a high point in my spiritual life'.

In order to better characterise the process of gaining psychological control, the Commission has tried to analyse the arguments used by the abusers to convince the people abused. This was done by relying on the words used in the available documents (correspondence and autobiographical accounts) or on the testimonies of the people involved in these relationships.

The first type of argument used was mystical and theological. The first justifications which the Commission discovered were those developed by Thomas Philippe. In Rome in 1938, he said he had experienced a mystical-sexual union with the Virgin Mary who had allegedly revealed a 'secret' to him: Jesus and Mary were supposed to have had a mystical-sexual relationship with the aim of rehabilitating the flesh and inaugurating the mystical relationships that will be experienced in the Kingdom. According to Thomas Philippe, it was after Christ's resurrection and probably after his Ascension and Mary's Assumption that the establishment of a mystical and carnal bond between Jesus and Mary was fully achieved. A nun abused in the early 1950s testified that he argued that the caresses had the function of transubstantiating her female body into that of Mary, thus likening these sexual exchanges to a sacrament. The same nun also recalled that he sought to justify this incestuous model by affirming that 'there is no line of demarcation between maternal love and conjugal love, that there is love in general, which demands total freedom'.

By referring to the biblical passages where God commands a person to kill (Abraham and Isaac), or to sleep with a prostitute (Hosea and Gomer), Thomas Philippe wanted to show that God sometimes asks a person to go against his commandments.

The work of the Brothers of Saint John and the testimony of Michèle-France Pesneau, abused by the two Philippe brothers for many years, show that Marie-Dominique Philippe shared many of his brother's arguments, in particular those aimed at describing these sexual acts as 'graces' that allowed sexual practices beyond common morality. Marie-Dominique Philippe also spoke of 'positive virginity', like his brother Thomas who, as reported by Madeleine Guérault, confided that 'all this greatly honoured N.S. [Notre Seigneur = Our Lord] and the T. Ste V. [Très Sainte Vierge = Most Holy Virgin], because the sexual organs were, much more than the Sacred Heart, the symbols of the greatest love'. With Pauline, a young woman who reported being abused by Gilbert Adam, he used an argument close to that of 'positive virginity': 'He went so far as to tell me that God wanted to re-virginize everything in me- through him of course.'

Jean Vanier's arguments were clearly in line with those advanced by his master, with the desire to minimize the sexual nature of the acts committed in favour of the primacy of spiritual communion. He often took up the reference to Jesus and Mary. This reference was explicitly present in two of the five testimonies analysed, and partially in another two. The substance of the argument was identical to that of Thomas Philippe from whom it came, but its expression varied a little with the phrase: 'It's not us, it's Mary and

Jesus'. At the very least, what he was suggesting here supposed a form of mystical assimilation to the persons of Jesus and Mary. The theme of assimilation to Jesus and Mary is, for example, omnipresent in his correspondence with Brigitte between 1987 and 2019. He wrote to her that she was called by Jesus to engage in a spiritual process aiming to make her 'become Mary', or even 'the heart of Mary', in a relationship where for her, Jean Vanier was the manifestation of the presence of Jesus; in return, she was called to 'carry' and 'sustain' him. Another woman reports similar remarks: 'Several times, I expressed my astonishment to him by saying that I did not understand how I could express my love, as a consecrated person, both to Jesus and to him. He answered me each time: 'But Jesus and I are not two, we are one', and: 'It is Jesus who loves you through me'.

As already mentioned, for Thomas Philippe, much more than the Sacred Heart, the sexual organs were the symbol of the greatest love. For Jean Vanier, when he mentioned to Brigitte the prostate operation which he had to undergo, he claimed that his genital organs were 'sacred', and referred to them as 'the sacrament of love', thus giving a sacramental dimension to his mystical-sexual practices.

The use of references to the spiritual authority of Thomas Philippe by his disciples Jean Vanier and Gilbert Adam is to be noted. Thus, in Brigitte's testimony: 'But at that time, I shared this with him [questions about the nature of the relationship that was beginning] and he said to me: 'Listen, I understand the questions. You are absolutely right to ask them'. [...] He said to me, 'In fact, you need to 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 don't have to worry. It's true that it's the Lord who is leading us and who is leading you, and you have to trust'. [...] Yes, it was in the early 1950s and if you want, I'll talk to you about it one day.' Or, as Gilbert Adam wrote in a strange e-mail he sent to Pauline's parents just after she had revealed to them that she had suffered abuse from him: 'I want you to know that I was accompanied by Father Thomas as supervisor in the accompaniment of Pauline. If I did not properly understand and carry out this spiritual accompaniment, I ask for her forgiveness. If there is an error, we must blame Father Thomas, because he followed and guided everything. This man has suffered so much from the 'vulgarity' of the world in front of the beauty and richness of the mystery of Jesus and Mary in the Incarnation of the Word of God. It is a mystery which can be grasped in the internal forum only, and of which the world understands nothing. Father Thomas had to explain himself, which cost him dearly and he suffered terribly'.

A second argument used by the perpetrators of abuse to win over those caught up in an abusive or transgressive relationship was to claim an authority through which they hoped to obtain obedience. The sacredness of the priestly state was an argument frequently put forward by Thomas Philippe. When Jean Vanier proposed something, he relied on his prophetic aura, and also on the role of the priest.

The affective dimension occupied a central place. This dimension aimed to create a sense of being selected, convincing the other that he or she had been chosen to receive special manifestations of divine love. We have seen that Thomas Philippe used such arguments with Jean Vanier, who then reproduced them. He thus wrote 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 words of the chaplain [...], then by the words that Jesus gave you. Jesus invites you to a crazy trust. He is choosing you. He is calling you to receive these graces of love that the world does not want to receive'.

The Commission hypothesizes that, in Jean Vanier's case, the importance given to the affective dimension, defined as a quest for a communion of mystical love, reveals something about his way of assimilating the beliefs and practices of Thomas Philippe. His remarks are therefore perhaps more on a mystical-affective than mystical-sexual level, even if, as he recognizes when describing his initiation, the former led to the latter.

In the arguments deployed by the perpetrators of abuse, this affective and divine election cannot exist without a renunciation of reason, which was presented as a spiritual battle to be waged against oneself. Often with Thomas Philippe, but also with Marie-Dominique Philippe, this last argument was used in an accusing way, when the person involved in the relationship was asking questions, and beginning to have doubts and demanding explanations. This anti-intellectualism was constantly reiterated as a denunciation of the intellectual pride of theologians and philosophers. This renunciation of reason thus became an essential condition for the initiation. This is what Thomas Philippe indicated to a nun who testified in 1952: 'He explained to me that it was not up to me to make this discernment [on what is divine

or not], that he was an instrument of God, and therefore actually and directly moved by God, and that it was therefore God himself that I was refusing, due to the barrier of my human intelligence’.

The last series of arguments that the Commission has been able to identify aimed to isolate the person under coercive control: the argument was that ‘the world’ cannot understand these graces, and that consequently, it is necessary to look elsewhere for guarantees about what is being experienced, with the help of people designated by the perpetrator of the abuse. This argument 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.

The systemic dimension is particularly visible when the perpetrators of abuse acted directly to support each other. This was done in order to strengthen the hold exercised over their respective victims or to try to prevent them from speaking out when they attempted to free themselves from the coercive control they were undergoing. So in the early 1990s, Joseph, a man who had just learned that his wife had been sexually abused by Thomas Philippe at La Ferme, received this answer from Marie-Dominique Philippe, in whom he had confided: ‘He was a little bit angry, and said to me: ‘You are not in the conscience of Father Thomas’. Then he told me about Shem and Japheth who covered Noah’s nudity by walking backwards, so as not to see his nudity (Gen 9.23). [...] He also told me that once they had got married, he shouldn’t have done this. The idea that Father Marie-Do. wanted to convey to me was that there are things that one cannot understand, and that one should not judge Father Thomas’ intentions’.

CHAPTER 17

Consent

The Commission examined the question of ‘apparent consent’ as perceived by people who consider themselves to be ‘survivors’ or ‘victims’ of abusive practices, or to have been partners in a transgressive relationship.

Consent should not be confused with giving oneself or with sexual desire. It encompasses an explicit ‘yes’ as well as a whole range of behaviours open to various interpretations. The significance of these behaviours can be grasped only by analysing the situations of interaction and the relational configurations that made them possible.

The loss of reference points and feelings of confusion are signs pointing to the existence of a potentially abusive situation. The testimonies received by the Commission reveal the disorder, the incomprehension and even the overwhelming turmoil experienced by these women. One of them testifies: ‘I did not know if it was good or bad. After the first time, I was totally lost. [...] Even afterwards I had trouble distinguishing if it was good or not, if it was part of the accompaniment: to be chosen, chosen by Jesus: Jean substituted himself for Jesus. [...] Despite everything, he continued to be my guide. He had a hold on me. At the same time, it also made me feel good’.

All the stories of people caught in an abusive or transgressive relationship also mention trust in the abuser, reinforced by the certainty of his charisma. If the victim gave in, it was first and foremost because she believed that the words, actions and intentions of the interlocutor-abuser were good, despite her feeling of confusion. One of the points in common between these women is to have been spiritually accompanied under coercive control. This is also observed when the relationship with the abuser had begun in an earlier moment of existential distress, or during a personal tragedy, and he then appeared as ‘a saviour’. – ‘He is like a ‘midwife’ for me since he leads me into life. [...] JV’s physical gift is unbearable for me. He is 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 would do without you’, I told him. But his desire is to free me, to give me life, and for that the umbilical cord must be cut. Wait: he told me he was the midwife’.

In a situation of coercive control, being convinced of the superiority of the abuser prevented the person from questioning the sexual touching as well as the discourse used to justify it. For some, the relationship was intimidating, and they were afraid of displeasing him if they openly expressed fears, misunderstandings or doubts: ‘I didn’t want to disappoint him. But I couldn’t do it. So, I remained hesitant... And during all this time, things continued with Jean at this level’.

In some cases, the fear of displeasing was associated with the fear of being abandoned. And sometimes this asymmetry led to the legitimate consideration that the expectations and needs of the abuser took precedence over those of the abused person. Several women expressed their intention to put themselves at the service of this exceptional man without putting more worries on his shoulders: ‘I remember that once, when I had not seen him for quite a while, I became aware that he was on his knees in front of me, and I silently told myself that I had to force myself a little in front of this man with such a big age difference, to cuddle him, to cajole him, but that feeling would not last long...’

Convinced of the charisma – even of the sanctity – of the abuser, all witnesses stated their conviction that he was ‘God’s representative’ or at least the mediator of the divine will concerning them. This is particularly obvious in the stories of women for whom the religious vocation, the spiritual quest, and the desire to respond to a divine call are intimately intertwined with the abusive experience. Accepting the initiatives of the abuser may have been, for some people, a way of trying to deepen their spiritual lives. Many were convinced by the discourse of justification and sincerely believed that they were the chosen beneficiaries of a ‘divine secret’. The mystical-sexual belief may have been facilitated by the feeling that it was part of the spirituality inherent in L’Arche. For others, the turmoil and discomfort felt was seen not as

a wake-up call, but as proof of their lack of faith and unworthiness: as Judy Farquharson, a 'survivor' of an abusive relationship with Jean Vanier, put it: 'I rather thought that the problem came from me, that I did not have the right spirituality and that, consequently, I did not understand the importance of what was going on. [...] That's how I felt: unworthy of this special relationship. Not understanding or believing that I was 'chosen', 'special', and not being able to tell anyone made me feel 'not good enough' and that feeling stayed with me for many years'.

Several people testified to their conviction that they had been introduced to a liberating form of relationship, a source of spiritual and personal fulfilment. Jean Vanier himself testified to this when he spoke of his first experiences with Jacqueline d'Halluin. A person described her own relationship with Jean Vanier as a most welcome experience of deep love, firmly anchored in Trinitarian love, basically accepting the intertwining of affective, spiritual, and sexual spheres. Nevertheless, she told the Commission later that she would no longer engage in a relationship of this nature, and that she now perceived its abusive dimension.

At the other end of the spectrum, several women requalified their apparent consent as an abdication of their critical faculties. This is the case not only of persons whose abusive situations were furthest back in the past, but also of persons who had chosen to be accompanied psychologically, and sometimes also spiritually, with the intention of finding a way out of the multiple psychological, affective, spiritual, sexual consequences caused by relationships with abusers.

Referring to the abuses committed by the Philippe brothers, one woman stated: 'He put my conscience to sleep'. Michèle-France Pesneau described the suspension of her ability to reason as follows: 'My capacity to reason is silent in the face of this religious man who had once told me that I should 'above all not try to analyse' what was happening in my spiritual life, which he had already taken control of, combining the abuse of spiritual power with sexual abuse'.

For her part, Eva, a consecrated laywoman who had been trapped in an abusive relationship with Jean Vanier for several years, wrote: 'I must have seen, I did see, how much my actions and his went against my virginal gift to Christ... This is where I can see a psychological hold on me, as if I was fascinated. I was no longer capable of a critical view of these acts and of this secret love. Fascination because I was irresistibly attracted although it felt "strange".'

Finally, other women affirmed that they later regretted their intimate gestures with Jean Vanier, as well as the state of confusion which this had temporarily placed them in, while claiming not to have been upset or affected long-term and refusing to identify themselves publicly as 'victims'. This standpoint was not encountered among Thomas Philippe's victims.

For these women, the suffering caused by the awareness of betrayal, in the domains of both friendship and professionalism, is the dominant feeling today: 'You know, I mean, about this story, I do not consider myself a victim. But I feel deeply betrayed at the level of friendship and at the level of my vocation, because what Jean was living was not celibacy. And yet he encouraged celibacy among the people of the L'Arche; so there is a real feeling of betrayal. I mean, celibacy is clearly defined as the absence of genital activity, and what he was doing was...'

Talking about the consent of people caught in an abusive or transgressive relationship is detrimental for the victims and quite advantageous for the aggressors. This amounts to implicitly assuming that the victims were free and responsible – which was usually not the case. This also means transferring the responsibility to them, by ignoring or even cancelling that of the oppressor, and suggests in passing that the abuse could not have occurred without their collaboration.

The Commission emphasizes that even if the report's focus is on acts of a sexual nature, the testimonies show that they are but one dramatic dimension of a much bigger problem of multi-faceted manipulation. The stories have made it possible to observe various forms of internalization of norms, judgments, expectations and exemplifications in terms of social relationships and sex.

CHAPTER 18

Breaking free from psychological control

The process of breaking free involves the restoration of the link with the outside world: the confrontation with a different reality makes for the unmasking of the system of abuse.

The duration of abusive or transgressive relationships varied greatly. Some seem to have lasted only a few weeks, while others seem to have lasted entire adult lives. This was the case of those like Jean Vanier, who having been victims of abuse became in their turn perpetrators. They seem to have based their entire existence on the beliefs justifying the system. In the case of Jean Vanier, the abusive relationship with two women extended over a period of a few years (from approximately two to five years), while other women spoke of a period of one or more decades. In the case of Thomas Philippe, for some, the abusive relationships lasted eighteen months, eight years or fourteen years. Twenty-four years for Marie-Dominique Philippe. For Gilbert Adam, the relationships described by Pauline and Élodie lasted from a few years to a decade. The dozens of cases studied seem to indicate that the greater the variety of ways in which influence was exercised in a relationship, (the spiritual, psychological, professional dimensions, etc.), the longer the process of breaking free took.

Some women say that they took the initiative to break free when they no longer felt able to live in a relationship that was causing suffering, a feeling of 'chaos', 'collapse' or overload. Thus H  l  ne and Eva, who had been caught up in a relationship with Jean Vanier, said respectively: 'Then I no longer felt comfortable in this form of relationship behind closed doors; at that point, I expressed that it did not make sense to me and that this form of relationship between marriage and celibacy was going nowhere'. And: 'When it had gone on a long time, as an established thing, I had the impression that I had become an object because at these times he would say little; he was showing his love. And it took several days for me to recover internally'.

A second way consciousness was raised was through the intervention of an outsider: when the person under psychological control talked openly about what they were experiencing (even in euphemistic terms) the outsider challenged them. Thus Cecilia, abused by Thomas Philippe at L'Arche, said: 'So in '80 I met Donna and she asked me what was up and... I became all... all purple when she said to me: 'D'you pray in the nude?' And then... it was she who told me: 'But that doesn't come from God!' And I think that I immediately knew that she was right and immediately I... I just caught the plane, returned and never went back to see Father Thomas for spiritual accompaniment...' With the help of a few incisive words, Donna Maronde Varnau, who had herself confronted Thomas Philippe a few years earlier, awakened Cecilia to the reality of her situation.

The moment of realisation could also be triggered by a disagreement between the perpetrator of the abuse and the person under their influence.

The testimonies underline how slow and difficult the process of breaking free was, once one had realised the truth. It was hard to make a moral judgement, to name and to repudiate a destructive experience. It was hard to confront the perpetrators of abuse and those supporting them. It was hard to break away from the circle of trust, whether amicable, fraternal or professional: the break often led to the additional penalty of being side-lined and isolated. The difficulty was also linked to the harassment inflicted by the perpetrator of the sexual abuse. It should be noted that, in the case of Jean Vanier, none of the women reported pressure or harassment on his part. It seems that in each case he simply accepted the person's decision. But he expressed his lack of understanding and showed no sign of guilt. The Commission hypothesizes that this type of response is a sign of Jean Vanier's own entrapment in the system of abuse and his inability to consider the harm that may have occurred and to show sympathy.

H  l  ne testified that after telling Jean Vanier of her desire to put an end to the sexual relationship, 'his answer was: "Yes, but it does us good!" He didn't say anything else. I was mortified and disappointed

by his reaction, his lack of recognition.' He seemed not to understand how this form of relationship could raise questions for me and despite my questioning he apparently did not wish to try to understand. I then stated my wish not to break off the relationship entirely, but that it could remain on the level of friendship, which he immediately accepted without resorting to any spiritual blackmail or any pressure in any way'.

If seeking professional psychological help was perhaps a necessary support on the path to breaking free, the collective and institutional dimension was also important. Victim support associations have offered sharing groups for victims, published testimonies and provided resources to nourish the reflection and provide support of other victims on the path to recovery. Speaking out has contributed to raising collective awareness of the existence of common and repeated abusive mechanisms, but also, to a certain extent, to the formation of the collective identity of Jean Vanier's or Thomas Philippe's 'victims' or 'survivors'. These individual paths of breaking free have benefited from a broad shift in the way the founders were seen within L'Arche, by lifting the veil on the mechanisms of collective blindness. An example described by Michèle-France Pesneau, was the meeting on October 4, 2015, between four of Thomas Philippe's victims. At Trosly-Breuil, several of the victims also found significant listening and support among some members of L'Arche, in a community that struggled to hear the voices of the victims and to realise that it had been harbouring a system of abuse.

Due to the weight of shame and guilt, the fear of appearing disloyal to L'Arche and its founders, and above all the fear of not being believed, the reporting of the abuse was difficult, especially since it concerned people with a very good reputation and strong aura. Many people had an unfortunate first experience of speaking up. Corinne's testimony illustrates this: 'In 2010, I was on a silent retreat, and all of a sudden these facts, these images resurfaced. I spoke about it to the priest who was giving the retreat; he replied that it was not good, but offered no other reaction, no support, advice, or 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 he read this letter, so I hand-delivered it to him. He read it; he said to me: 'I thought that it was good'. He didn't say anything else to me. I was hurt and disappointed by his reaction, his non-recognition'. How indeed to speak out and make a public denunciation, after the feeble reaction of this priest and the lack of empathy and dialogue with Jean Vanier? H el ene, for her part, recounted an even more humiliating experience: 'I tried to talk about our relationship with the abbot of a monastery who knew him. He would not listen and quickly said that I was making it up. Also the same reaction with another person who knew him and whom I trusted'.

The victims' complaints about the abuses were mainly made to the leaders of L'Arche or of the Catholic Church. To date, no complaint to the French or Canadian judicial authorities has been filed. The one case of a judicial report being submitted was in 2013 and concerned Gilbert Adam: it was dismissed. The people that the Commission met had not felt ready to come forward publicly before the abusers had died. The opportunity to start legal proceedings against them has now passed. Generally, the testimonies of the victimised persons were given in confidence. Some of them, however, judging the institutional response insufficient or feeling the need to help other victims, chose to share their testimony publicly.

The Commission also looked into the question of how the leaders and members of L'Arche reacted. The Commission has been able, in full transparency, to consult the abundant documentation gathered by the crisis unit set up for that purpose (including a detailed logbook of the events that had occurred, correspondence between the parties involved, minutes of meetings and testimonies).

Regarding Thomas Philippe, it was mainly the representatives of the Catholic Church who acted to verify the facts, listen to the victims and collect new testimonies. With the stated desire of protecting the confidentiality promised to the victims, only a simple summary of the investigation report was given to the leaders of L'Arche, the result of which was made public in a letter dated April 28, 2015. The investigator met thirteen people and identified nine victims. This allowed a first group of victims to be listened to. However, due to a lack of sufficient communication within L'Arche, several victims were not aware of the process that was under way, and came forward too late over the following months. Although this first investigation marked a major turning point in the process of denouncing the abuse and although it went on to trigger other testimonies, with hindsight it appears incomplete and inadequate, given the scale and seriousness of the problem. No historical research was carried out, even though Thomas Philippe's 1956 conviction was known to all the actors. Similarly, no link seems to have been made with Pauline's accusation of sexual abuse by Gilbert Adam, a recognized disciple of Thomas Philippe's, even though his

case had been investigated by the Bishop of Beauvais just one year earlier. Finally, it appears surprising that the investigator did not question Jean Vanier.

These observations are not intended to make an *'a posteriori'* judgment, but to point out the blind spots in the process of collectively breaking free from psychological control. Jean Vanier remained protected by his aura, as founder and as a great spiritual figure, so that the women were not able to fully express what they had to say. L'Arche International relied totally on the Church. As a result, the investigation lacked multidisciplinary breadth and the contribution of people from outside L'Arche and the Church- a necessary step for better understanding.

Nevertheless, it was a major turning point in denouncing the system of abuse, allowing the revelation of its existence by the leaders of L'Arche and by the press, which triggered a chain reaction of other testimonies, and notably the first ones concerning Jean Vanier.

However, it is important to remember that this process of speaking out placed some of the victims in difficult situations. Thus Michèle-France Pesneau was confronted with hostile reactions from those who, at the start, were openly in denial, of those who thought that too much fuss was being made and that too great a place was being given to these abuses. Jean Vanier's complicit silence was also an obstacle.

In December 2014, as the investigation on Thomas Philippe was ending, the leaders of L'Arche received a first report from a woman who clearly expressed her distress at the abusive nature of her relationship with Jean Vanier. However, she insisted on remaining anonymous and affirmed that she did not want L'Arche to make use of her testimony. She simply wanted to warn the leaders about other testimonies to come, concerning Jean Vanier. This was why the leaders of L'Arche could not act on her report.

Judy Farquharson's testimony arrived in May 2016. The international leaders reactivated the crisis unit they had created for Thomas Philippe and worked as a team to analyse the facts. An opinion sought from a psychologist and a psychoanalyst outside L'Arche called for caution. The woman who had testified was open to the leaders of the various bodies of L'Arche International being informed of her testimony but did not want it to be known beyond that restricted circle. The woman who had testified in December 2014 was re-contacted and maintained her wish not to be involved. To this should be added the negative response given by the Dominicans to the leaders of L'Arche International who had asked them to open their archives concerning Thomas Philippe.

Given these conditions, the crisis unit decided to wait for new information, making preparations both to receive it and to disclose the known facts to the members of L'Arche and to the wider public.

The leaders of L'Arche met regularly with Jean Vanier, questioning him closely to explain himself about this relationship, as well as its potential link with the practices of Thomas Philippe. On the possible similarity of this relationship with those of Thomas Philippe, he gave no explicit confirmation, but admitted that he had had a relationship of this type with Jacqueline d'Halluin.

At that time, the aura of Jean Vanier was undiminished. The desire to get answers from him involved a form of negotiation where one went forward respectfully. While reaffirming his desire to be open, Jean Vanier said as little as possible and managed to drag things out. Despite their earnest desire to reach the truth, it was hard for the leaders of L'Arche to free themselves from the strong ties that each one had with Jean Vanier. It was also difficult for the institution to step back from the priority of its own unity and continuation.

The only solution was to outsource the investigation process. This was the option chosen when a new testimony was received in March 2019. In fact, it was necessary to wait until June 2019 for the announcement of the investigation concerning Jean Vanier, a few months after his death, so that the reality of the system of abuse that had been harboured at L'Arche since its foundation could become known.

Part 5

Psychiatric hypotheses

CHAPTER 19

Abuse, delusion and perversion

The events that have marked L'Arche, and more particularly 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 of work for historians to understand and reveal the complexity. 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, it is not contrary to psychiatric ethics to formulate hypotheses, provided that one doesn't slide unwittingly into certainty.

It seems that Jean Vanier never sought help from a psychiatrist or psychotherapist, despite encouraging their role in L'Arche. As he wrote in the book entitled *Leur regard perce nos ombres*, the collection of letters with Julia Kristeva: '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 see or cannot see. Personally, I don't feel the need to pursue this work on myself any further.' Was he too aware of his flaws? Was he afraid that the nature of what he called 'hidden elements' would be deduced? It is regrettable that he did not consider analysis useful: the course of his life might have been different.

Sexual abuse

The sexual acts attributed to Jean Vanier by several women qualify as abusive. Divested of spiritual justification, they demonstrate characteristics typical of this kind of behaviour.

From the standpoint of psychiatry what has been already described in this report is reinforced. A gradual build-up of intimacy to the point of sexual activity is very destructive because the abused person considers that she shares responsibility for her own humiliation. She begins by thinking that she is chosen, then realises that she is not the only one and that she is being used rather than loved. She understands that, despite its duration, the relationship is stereotypical and limited to brief encounters. Feelings of bitterness or anger ensue. It is possible that years later she will still be suffering from her experiences with Jean Vanier, who represented a stable support, the loss of which could cause mental breakdown. Only long psychological analysis can help her to move on, if that is possible.

As is almost always the case, the abuser minimised or ignored the suffering they inflicted on their prey and felt no guilt. 'My conscience is clear,' said Jean Vanier when talking to Erol Franko, a former psychiatrist for L'Arche, after the first complaint about him. He defended himself, saying that he considered they had given their consent freely, adding with almost amused detachment: 'In fact, I think those women must have been in love with me.' When women told him how much they had suffered from their relationship with him, he never acknowledged the abusive nature of his conduct.

Jean Vanier's personality

Jean Vanier is characterised by several personality traits: charisma, seduction, manipulation, a tendency for secrecy, a desire for popularity, an ability to persuade and suggest, the avoidance of confrontation, and authoritarianism. He was an exceptional leader, as demonstrated by L'Arche's success

and its expansion across all the continents in just a few years. Jean Vanier displayed abundant energy, constant creativity, and a desire to help with affection and humour. He was much in demand as a speaker and met resounding success around the world.

Jean Vanier also showed an aptitude to trust the members of his team and urged them to take on challenges they thought they were incapable of achieving. They didn't all succeed, but his trust was a powerful boost for positive results. He certainly showed a highly developed social intelligence and was adept at seducing people from diverse backgrounds with extraordinary conviction.

Jean Vanier did not disclose much. Was he on his guard, constantly on the lookout because he had so much to hide? Was the structure of his personality in danger if he was contradicted? Did he need to maintain the mystery, letting others project their own fantasies on the person of the founder of L'Arche? Was his reserve a result of his education? Undoubtedly, some or all of the above.

Each personality is too rich and unique to be placed in a category, and this also applies to Jean Vanier. Psychiatric categories about pathological personalities are not easy to apply in his case. By contrast, the Enneagram Personality Test, in which some L'Arche members have received training, can be applied with a certain caution. It distinguishes nine personality types. As is often the case, Jean Vanier placed himself in a different type to that attributed to him by others who were undoubtedly more objective. He claimed to be type 6, whereas an Enneagram specialist and others put him down as type 3, typical of leaders for whom popularity and success are priorities. Type 3 personalities lie and pretend in order to project a positive image. They display a certain vanity. Enneagram Type 6, which Jean Vanier considered himself to be, wants to be recognised for their integrity and is afraid of non-conformity. Type 3, on the other hand, aims to project a positive image and readily tells lies.

From a different, but complementary point of view, a psychoanalyst might consider that Jean Vanier's personality was not structured: rather, it was akin to a borderline state, neither psychotic nor neurotic, a sign of immaturity which left it prey to the phenomenon of coercive control. This doesn't exclude the possibility of perverse behaviour and delusional beliefs.

Thomas Philippe's influence

Thomas Philippe had a deep impact on Jean Vanier. It is worth remembering that Thomas Philippe had a strong influence - even a psychological hold - on Jean Vanier's mother. It is fair to presume that Jean Vanier was the ideal prey, given his immaturity and unstructured personality, his lack of direction, and the extreme and constant religious fervor he had always been surrounded with.

Jean Vanier's sex life

It is unknown whether Jean Vanier's initial experience with Jacqueline d'Halluin represented a discovery of sexuality or the discovery of a sexuality of a different type: easy and steeped in religious fervour. It is, however, clear that this experience marked him significantly.

An undated letter from Thomas Philippe to Jean Vanier seems to refer to physical intimacy between them, but also suggests that the distinction between the sexes is outdated except 'for divine games of love'.

Jean Vanier reproduced the sexual behaviour of the *tout petits* group which he joined. According to the testimonies currently available, this sexual behaviour only concerned adult women. He probably had a network of women around the world who could be considered as abused, the full extent of which is as yet unknown. There are mixed allusions - some of which are in code - to joys of past and future sex in his letters to various nuns and laywomen, confirming dates and with references to Jesus and Mary, sometimes in the same sentence and with the same fervor.

Thomas Philippe's 'erotic madness'

The case of Thomas Philippe may seem totally incongruous. He would not have completely surprised psychiatrists in the late 19th century. His case suggests a form of disorder described by Benjamin Ball in his book *La Folie érotique*, published in 1888. In the hallucinatory form of this disorder, where sexual arousal is central, Ball speaks of hallucinations affecting the genitals, in some cases reaching orgasm. It is probably this kind of delusional sensation that Thomas 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.

During various meetings between 1952 and 1956, many people reported that Thomas Philippe appeared 'disturbed'. In June 1952, Father Paul Philippe, who questioned him regularly, wrote to the master of the Dominican order: 'I dare to say that Fr Thomas scared me for the first time.' He suggested the cause might be schizophrenia and early dementia. The Holy Office sought several specialised psychiatric assessments. They were unanimous regarding serious mental disturbance.

Characteristics of Thomas Philippe's delusion

Delusion is defined as an idea that a person holds onto unshakably. ('The delusion is not in the theme, it is in the conviction,' said French psychiatrist Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault.) The conviction cannot be corrected despite evidence to the contrary.

Testimonies, especially by Thomas Philippe himself, allow us to form a hypothesis of a relatively structured chronic delusion around the primary delusional experience of physical union with the mother of Jesus. The hallucinations seem to have been physical rather than visual, hence affecting the sexual sphere. Typical of delusional people, Thomas Philippe was reluctant and, above all, deceitful, conscious that his words were difficult for others to accept. However, his conviction was total - one of the signs of delusion - and he never sincerely expressed the slightest doubt or admitted the pathological nature of his mental condition.

Thomas Philippe was convinced he was announcing a new age for the Church. His message was too innovative to be understood, but, according to him, it would be understood later. This attracted hostility, and, in his view, the disgrace of being considered mentally ill. The 'followers' and their master experienced these as special privileges and placed themselves above all authority and common morality. The term *tout petits* (little ones), and the focus on the poor, humble and disabled don't easily hide a probably immense megalomania and pride.

The delusion of Thomas Philippe was shared with a limited number of 'chosen' people. It was hidden, to use the term omnipresent in this whole affair, because its followers were still aware of its scandalous nature.

In relation to Thomas Philippe, one can perceive a form of confusion around respect for the differences and distance between divine and human beings. Thomas Philippe, like Jean Vanier after him, gave the impression of living intimately with Jesus and Mary, whose supposed relationship was repeated with their victims. Their victims were no longer considered to be people or individuals, but instruments and objects used to carry out these acts, where the protagonist identified themselves with Jesus or at least declared they were acting in communion with him.

Healing in a perverse mode

It is also right to consider the perverse behavior of Thomas Philippe and his followers. In some cases, sexual abuse is the result of individuals mixing psychosis and perversion, but it is not always easy to separate them. These perverse traits influenced the way Thomas Philippe exercised his control over all his followers, including over Jean Vanier.

One key element of Thomas Philippe's theological thinking was total submission to the divine personalities, and by extension, the total submission by his victims to the person who was some way their representative: 'it is Jesus who is loving you through me'. Various testimonies gathered at the time of the 2014 investigation into the abuse by Thomas Philippe in L'Arche, depict Thomas Philippe as authoritarian and unconcerned about others, eager to satisfy his impulses, justifying his practices with religious arguments. The women he abused were impressed to have been chosen by this '*Saint homme*' (holy man) who then deceived them and ordered them to say nothing.

Thomas Philippe possessed all the character traits of a sexual pervert: moral transgression, ritualised sexual practice in an imperious and exclusive way to achieve the satisfaction he needed, a partner viewed as a mere object to serve his satisfaction, and justifying his sexual practices with reference to a higher goal. A Holy Office document written by Father Paul Philippe describes him as a 'subtle pervert'.

Thomas Philippe placed himself beyond morality and reason, and therefore felt no guilt towards the people he abused. He justified himself by considering that he was practising a higher order of sexuality and celibacy. Such reflections were strongly echoed by Jean Vanier. In his 1984 work, *Homme et femme Il les fit*, he also contrasted genital sexuality with a sexuality of 'love and celebration'. More generally, this book, like many Jean Vanier's of writings and remarks, must be read and fully understood from the perspective of Thomas Philippe's teachings. For example, this is a 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.'

Shared delirium

If we consider that Thomas Philippe was delusional, what to say about all the people who followed his teaching and practices, starting with Jean Vanier? Were they also deluded?

The delusional conviction among Thomas Philippe's disciples was described in a letter from Father Ducatillon to Father Paul Philippe dated 13 June 1956: *The impression that emerges from the first investigations on behalf of the Holy Office – an impression shared by His Excellency Bishop Renard and by Canon Huyghe – is that we are confronted with souls who are ready to make any external submission, without the slightest hesitation or resistance, but who will be very difficult to convince inwardly. 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.'*

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 well-founded, not wanting any explanation', etc. This attitude is so similar to Father Thomas's attitude that I tremble at the thought that inwardly, these poor girls perhaps remain attached to him.'

More generally, Jean Vanier retained certain aspects of Thomas Philippe's delusion and perversity, particularly in relation to the body. Otherwise, in his writings and actions, he developed a more personal approach.

One of the characteristics of induced delusion is the disappearance of the delusion when the protagonist is removed. This was not observed in Jean Vanier who never broke free from the control that Thomas Philippe had over him, and to whom he was faithful until his death.

A narcissistic perverse nucleus within the Catholic Church?

Thomas Philippe had a profound influence on founders of religious movements. Several communities founded since the 1970s and led by people who had been spiritually guided or influenced by Thomas Philippe, were places of sexual abuse, such as the Community of Saint John, founded in 1974 by Marie-Dominique Philippe. Not to mention Ephraïm, founder of the Béatitudes, who said that Thomas Philippe approved of sexual abuse. Thierry de Roucy, at the origin of the charity Points-Coeur was also influenced by Thomas Philippe. He was reduced to the secular state in 2018 due to sexual abuse and abuse of power.

All these facts are reminiscent of Paul-Claude Racamier's work on perverse narcissistic nuclei with varying degrees of far-reaching toxic effects. He established their similarity to a shared delusion disorder between two people, but which can also be applied to larger groups. '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 a tightly held conviction which is unshakeable, delusional and beyond reason. The essence may be delusional, but the modalities of pragmatic application are precise and socially adapted (...). in the final analysis, would the manoeuvrings of a perverse nucleus be simply the actions - socially quite well adapted - of a delusional duo or trio?'

Given the many people who suffered from Thomas Philippe's spiritual and sexual abuse, directly or indirectly via followers who shared his delusions and reproduced his actions (first and foremost his brother Marie-Dominique and Jean Vanier), this can be described as a perverse toxic nucleus within the

Catholic Church. The photograph of these three men being received by Pope John-Paul II speaks volumes about their ability to infiltrate, seduce and deceive, which the Vatican was meant to be aware of. Without a doubt, this also says much about the dysfunction 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, not going beyond those affected. Even if one can speak about Racamier's perverse nucleus, there is little evidence that its toxicity deeply infiltrated into L'Arche. This is probably because L'Arche was not a closed environment, unlike many congregations, and the proliferation of many communities afforded great autonomy to their founders. Additional reasons can be found in the speed at which many diverse assistants arrived from all over the world, the lack of control over their profiles and the absence of a desire to actively promote this doctrine.

Part 6

Observations by a psychoanalyst

CHAPTER 20

The dangers of an unrecognized loneliness

How could a man so inhabited by the Word of God, a man who was so compassionate to people with a disability, be incapable of empathy for the women he was secretly seducing?

The psychoanalytic approach adopted to analyse this stark contrast has been based on S. Freud's theory and complemented by Donald W. Winnicott's work. Winnicott shed light on the importance of the environmental impact on a person's development, summed up in the phrase: 'I am seen, therefore I see.' **This approach therefore requires a tour through the history of Jean Vanier's childhood and his inter-relational and intergenerational experiences.** It is worth noting that Thomas Philippe used his interpretation of the mother-child relationship to justify his 'mystical' conception of relationships between men and women.

In retracing the course of his parents' lives and of Jean Vanier's own childhood, it can be seen how much such an embracing and tender attention was lacking. All three grew up in families abounding with ideals but prone to anxiety due to a lack of sensory and emotional interaction. For Jean Vanier, two extremes were in play at the same time. There was an illustrious aspect: his father Georges, a war hero, had prestigious posts, giving him access to relationships with the world's great figures, including several popes. At the same time, there was the terrifying aspect of the war, many moves, financial problems, and his mother Pauline's regular bouts of depression. There was no security on which to build trust, except perhaps the security attributed to Providence.

How could a young man, Georges, offer trench maps to the young girl he was courting and, on the occasion of their engagement, a box containing the mud from his boot the day he lost his leg? It seems that Georges had no idea of Pauline's feelings or desires, nor any inclination to understand them. His wife described him as 'imprisoned in his armour'. 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 which prevented her from taking an interest in others. Georges was raised in the Jansenist mould, where law, duty and the fear of hell were uppermost. For Pauline, by contrast, love and mercy were the priorities.

Jean Vanier's relational experiences during childhood were beset by anxiety due to ever-present insecurity. He suffered constant separations from an unpredictable mother and an absent father. For Jean, life was discovered directly in relation to God. His daily entries in his 1941 and 1942 diaries refer to Mass and Communion, but never mention his companions and associates, a characteristic shared with his Father's letters to his mother during the Great War. Similarly, it is difficult to find a mention or description of a comrade or friend in Jean Vanier's letters to his parents.

Life generally begins with a rooting which is both bodily and sensory. Constant emotional exchanges with one's environment help a person to put their feelings into words and little by little this allows them to make space for the other person. The opposite seems to be the case for Jean, whose real life, in the absence of friends and loving relationships, was found or possibly 'invented' directly in his relationship with God, in the 'spiritual' realm.

The clinical term for Jean Vanier's condition is 'functional limitation': due to distortions in early emotional relationships, subjects suffer from intense internal insecurity, linked to the anxiety of being abandoned if the other moves away or of falling under their control if they draw close again (intrusion).

Autonomy and dependence are painfully put in doubt. This helps us to understand his immense loneliness, but also what people who knew him frequently referred to as his need to control, sometimes even described as 'manipulation'.

Jean Philippe (Thomas by his religious name) and Jean Vanier had very different childhoods but they both featured omnipresent religion and the development of feelings of acute abandonment and insecurity. 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 us to understand the existential importance of their meeting!

Thomas Philippe's mystical theory seems to have provided an unexpected way out of the anxiety triggered by emptiness and abandonment, through a confirmation of God's presence, 'incarnated' in the relationship lived between Jesus and Mary. According to Thomas Philippe, the real life, the only life he knew and that was worth living was the supernatural life. Making that life known was his responsibility. Here is what he wrote in *La vie cachée de Marie (The hidden life of Mary)*: 'Mary, beloved mother, the Bride, the immaculate, had a life completely different to ours; in her there was no 'me', this reflexive consciousness that constantly refers to itself, this excessive activity that attempts to impose itself aggressively, seeking its own pleasure.'

Thomas Philippe justified his practices with the evangelical precepts of self-denial and sacrifice. He absolutised 'forgetting oneself' as 'all good', in radical poverty, smallness, silence, and emptiness. He also denounced 'everything bad' as a representation of reflexive consciousness, in its desire to use words to describe experiences of pleasure and displeasure, in pursuit of pleasure for itself. And if there is no me, there is of course no search for pleasure as such, and therefore no guilt. Mary exists only to love and be loved: 'Jesus does not give Mary his body in a sacramental way; from the Annunciation onwards, it is in a real and physical love relationship that he is given to her.' This was the 'instruction manual' conveyed to Thomas Philippe's disciples: the body of a woman is reserved for the pleasure of a man 'who is the visible representative of God'.

Jean Vanier's relationship with Thomas Philippe fulfilled all his deeply buried emotional needs. For the first time, not only did he no longer feel alone, he felt loved by someone who didn't make him feel trapped, because it reflected God's love for him: 'I discovered something unique through Father Thomas. I discovered through him, through his word, through his whole attitude, that I was loved by God'.

His thirst for relationships with people with disabilities confirmed the existential importance of touch, of physical contact in order to truly enter into a relationship. This reinforced, if such were needed, his holding fast to Thomas Philippe's conception of sexuality.

He wrote the following in *Man and Woman he made them* (1984): '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 woman-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 poor body crying out, wanting to be loved and appreciated by a mother. The body remembers the poverty of physical affection'.

He could be describing himself. In *Jesus the gift of love*, he expressed another form of the equivalence between the flesh and the divine in the gift of oneself to the other, which transfigures sexuality: 'The Word did not become flesh in the same way that one puts on a garment which one then takes off again; the flesh becomes divine. It becomes the means by which this life of the 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 goes on to speak about *interpersonal love*. The words sound true: why not accept them at face value? Yet behind the words, everything was confused. Like Thomas Philippe, an abysmal lack of authentic experiences of shared pleasure and physical connection prevented any process of separation from another person, with whom one could then make ties.

As with Thomas Philippe, instead of the contradictions Good/Evil, Self/Other, being transformed into paradoxes of life, they were abolished in a spiritual absolute of relationship that mixed them up together: sensation with affect, the body with the soul. All that was left was submission to the will of God. Any human relationship Jean experienced -- sexual or not -- was not important in itself, but only for the relationship it allowed with God. This explains why most of the intimate relationships he had with women were held in prayer and in the silence of worship.

The testimonies of women with a very different experience in their 'intimate' relationship with Jean Vanier demonstrate extremes we are faced with.

Extreme good: a desire to give himself totally to the other, echoing his total investment of faith in 'a God of Love'.

Extreme bad: being unable to build a secure inner foundation, it was almost impossible for him to feel empathy when the other person showed themselves to be different. That distorted his desire for communion. In that situation, apparently, he had little empathy and felt no guilt. When Judy told him she felt like 'a spiritual prostitute' and challenged him about his conduct towards her, how could such a strong advocate of mercy reply with: 'There is what you see -- and on the other hand, there is what I see: they have nothing to do with each other'.

It is a recurring theme: his body, his sensations, his affect were a wasteland. Thomas Philippe's theory provided a guilt-free escape route. Thomas Philippe could not play the role of an independent figure for Jean Vanier. On the contrary, he reflected his own image, like a mirror, shutting him in on himself again.

Faith in a God of Love gave Jean Vanier 'another place to put his experiences', perhaps helping him to partially escape Thomas Philippe's psychological hold. However, since he was not able to develop a real sense of the other, this meant that his gift of openness, his energy as a speaker and his very strong commitment to action were in certain circumstances transformed into emotional control and abuse of power, which he was unaware of: abuses that were all the more toxic because they were religiously justified and because they were emulated by his followers.

The question of taking a perverse pleasure in destroying, humiliating or reducing others to manipulated objects is very present in the case of Thomas Philippe. In the case of Jean Vanier, however there was no such perverse intention. He was, however, trapped by his absolutisation of a Love which, for him, ruled out any notion of Evil. He remained a prisoner of his adhesion to the delusional ideas and system of abuse of Thomas Philippe.

Part 7

Contribution to a critical analysis of Jean Vanier's spirituality

The purpose of the theological 'investigation' is to identify the spirituality that supported the expansion of L'Arche, but that also fostered abusive behaviour towards certain women. We suggest there is a link between Jean Vanier's spirituality, developed over decades in his conferences, retreats, articles and books, and his observed behaviour, both positive and negative.

This analysis applied practical theology involving wide reflection, on both the ecclesial and social levels, exploring talks, interviews, and written works of various genres. Regarding Jean Vanier, we carefully explored excerpts from some of his books where he outlined his thinking.

This research was conducted in several stages. A first review of some books allowed us to observe the frequent use of the word 'communion' when L'Arche assistants were invited to enter into a covenant with core members. A working hypothesis emerged: If L'Arche is built on a spirituality of covenant with people with disabilities, Jean Vanier mainly promoted a spirituality of communion rooted in a form of Carmelite mysticism and an anthropology which was likewise inherited from his spiritual father, Thomas Philippe. A dangerous lack of space for 'the other' emerges here.

CHAPTER 21

Jean Vanier: a new spiritual master?

The wide range of styles found in Jean Vanier's books is striking but many common points are quickly identifiable in this disparate collection. Jean Vanier was writing mainly about his personal experience of living with people with disabilities. Secondly, he claimed he wrote as a disciple of Jesus, bearing witness to a faith with a mystical undertone. Finally, he was writing in order to teach and to communicate, to encourage new vocations among 'wounded' people, and to find new assistants for the growing number of L'Arche communities.

One strong reference point was constantly emphasised: living closely with fragile, poor, wounded people in order to be converted by them, personally and collectively. This reference point was always related to the way Jesus lived, loved and chose mainly abandoned and marginalised people. This is more than just an idea: it is a practice demonstrated by the existence of L'Arche communities. The credibility of his entire written work is based on this undeniable reality.

His writing style is purposely simple, with no intellectual jargon, and is in tune with the evolution of society. Jean Vanier knew how to relate to his contemporaries and to young people who aspired to an ideal of life that was communal, intentional and genuinely evangelical. He dared to think outside academic boxes, exploring diverse cultures and religions, cultivating an ideal in opposition to a world of competition, individualism and useless wealth.

Drawing on its common features, Jean Vanier's written work can be classified as 'spiritual writings', as even his anthropological reflections were inspired by biblical revelation. But references to the scriptures evolved over time, and he gradually neglected giving precise references. His citations became increasingly implicit, referring most often to John the Evangelist. He clearly says that his aim was to touch the heart rather than speak to reason. This might explain the freedom he took in commenting on the Scriptures. In this way, he was suggesting that his was an interpretation that carried authority.

When Jean Vanier no longer quoted a full text from the Holy Scriptures, he increasingly opted for psychological and imaginative interpretations. When referring to scenes from the Gospels, he described conduct by Jesus and other details not found in the biblical narrative. This gives rise to the thought that he was not referring to the true meaning of the biblical text, but hijacking it to express his own thinking.

When he described the life of Jesus in Nazareth before his public ministry, Jean Vanier invented elements that are not in the Gospels. He believed that the spirituality of Nazareth was as the heart of the life of L'Arche communities. He highlighted the idea of a 'secret' and 'mystery' that were 'very hidden'. These words, often recurring in Jean Vanier's writing, ultimately refer to the way of living the 'communion' between Jesus and his mother rather than with the Holy Trinity.

We now know that this relationship is at the heart of Thomas Philippe's spirituality, where it took an incestuous form. Of course, Jean Vanier referred only to 'divine communion' between Mary and Jesus, but his whole vocabulary maintained an atmosphere of mystery which the 'initiates' could understand differently to most readers. His reflections aimed to be accessible by the widest population, but he seems at certain moments to slip into a coded language addressed specifically to the followers of his delusional mysticism. For example, he played on a possible interpretation of '*petits*' to refer to disciples of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. The hidden life of his followers would become like Nazareth, a form of spirituality developed at Eau Vive by Thomas Philippe. Only readers aware of Jean Vanier's unwavering loyalty to his spiritual father could see behind the veil. Other readers would pass over it, not seeing any ambiguity, most being attracted by his way of sharing spiritual insights.

Despite his links with the Catholic Church, he rarely referred to it and the Commission does not perceive any real reflection about the Church. Was it a subject he preferred to avoid? Jean Vanier was essentially critical of the hierarchical dimension of the Church. He contrasted it with the idea of a universal Church open to all people, because Jesus can speak to each heart. His Church, the one he loved, was in fact

L'Arche; the 'wounded' people whom he identified with Jesus himself, as well as those who answered the call to personally look after the 'poor'. His Church needed priests so that the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the Eucharist shaped the community's way of life. The expression 'my Church' first appeared in a 2012 book, *The Signs of the Times*. It features twice in the same passage which many people will agree with: 'It is through the Church that Jesus called me to bring good news to the poor and proclaim liberty to those who are captive and oppressed. I am grateful to my Church for the nourishment of the sacraments, the word of God and the inspiration given by the successor to Peter. [...] However, I am disappointed by the loss of faithfulness 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 church officials affirm that faith in Jesus is intimately bound to this commitment to the poor.'

Every single book mentions the need for spiritual accompaniment. His preference for accompaniment via 'filiation' was clearly expressed in the book *Community and Growth*. This emphasis corresponded to his own experience with Thomas Philippe who placed excessive value on the role of the guide. This was demonstrated in his attraction to the Indian tradition of gurus who train their disciples with close ties and a lengthy period of instruction. Jean Vanier also evoked the role of the guide, as both model and witness. The Commission observes that these two modes may present risks. Is there any real freedom in a 'filiation' approach? And as for 'guidance', it may become too directive if the guide thinks he knows the path the person should follow.

There is no doubt that Jean Vanier was wearing two hats, as founder of L'Arche and as a spiritual master bringing a new spirituality – the common denominator being proximity to the 'wounded'.

CHAPTER 22

A spirituality of covenant?

Some L'Arche assistants 'announced the Covenant' to express their decision to maintain a long-term bond with people with disabilities. The first assistants to commit themselves did so in the course of a retreat led by Marie-Dominique Philippe in 1978, during a Eucharist. It later took place during a celebration including the ritual of the 'washing of the feet'. This commitment was neither a sacrament nor a vow taken before entering into the consecrated life as defined by the canon law of the Catholic Church. It was, however, important for people because it cemented a community-oriented life with people with disabilities, within a relationship of closeness specifically described as covenant. This reality of the covenant was practised at L'Arche until the 2000s.

In his rare references to the covenant in his books, Jean Vanier presents it as an interdependence experienced between the assistant and person with a disability: they carry each other. This reciprocal covenant made it possible to love and let oneself be loved, to welcome the weakness of the other as well as our own. This focus on reciprocity erases the idea of asymmetry – a key aspect in the covenant relationship between God and humans – but also the differences between the partners.

In the books *Community and Growth* and *Tears of Silence*, Jean Vanier's spirituality seems to operate with two covenant models. The first is Christological, evoking the relationship with the 'poor', the other is nuptial, in order to speak about the intimate relationship between the believer and God.

To illustrate the community relationships of L'Arche between assistants and people with disabilities, Jean Vanier evokes the covenant between Jesus Christ and the poor. In his writings, there is a shift towards an identification of the poor with the figure of Christ, of Jesus himself. 'The poor is Jesus' and conversely 'Jesus is the poor'. This is problematic because if we only see Jesus in the Poor, do we also see the person behind the face of Christ? If we identify them with Christ, does the person feel loved for themselves? If one of the actors of the covenant disappears behind the other, the reality of the covenant collapses. The consequence of this fusion between Jesus and the poor carries three risks: the removal of an individual's suffering due to its identification with that of Christ; the obliteration of the individual personality of the person with a disability in seeing only Jesus in them; and the sanctification of the poor person and their body.

The place of the body in Jean Vanier's spirituality is also revealed in excerpts about Jesus and Mary. The body in itself becomes a spiritual element with a Eucharistic vocabulary (gift of the body, 'real presence', food). Without even trying to make a direct connection with Thomas Philippe's deviant spirituality focusing on Mary, the Commission points to the overvaluation both of the body, 'a channel perfectly open to grace', and of touch. Without proper discernment, this role of the body can potentially lead to excesses.

Jean Vanier did not raise such questions when he spoke about touching the bodies 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 washed. The only language he could understand was that of the tenderness conveyed via the hands: a language of gentleness, safety, but also a language that my body and its vibrations clearly 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.'

The reader can note here an over-spiritualization and the presence of elements that could lead to abuse. We repeat that the Commission is not aware of any abuse of people with disabilities.

Still, it is surprising to see the lack of in-depth thought about the 'touch' of Jesus in Jean Vanier's writings. In the Gospel of John, the scene of the washing of the disciples' feet is not focused on touching - the verb used is 'drying' - but rather on the reversal of roles where the master becomes the servant. In any case, the touch of Jesus liberates speech, even when he gives the order to be quiet. Words of gratitude spring forth, instead of speech being impeded as in the case of abuse.

Marriage is a recurring theme in Jean Vanier's spirituality. Attentive reading of his work leads to the conclusion that God as spouse (of the individual person, and of the people) has more weight than God as a bringer of freedom. The reciprocal bond of belonging comes first in this notion of covenant. Furthermore, for Jean Vanier, 'leaving the Divine Spouse' is an expression of sin. The importance given to the nuptial dimension of divine love reinforces, if that were needed, the emphasis placed on relationships of 'communion'.

CHAPTER 23

A spirituality of communion?

Any reader of Jean Vanier's books might agree that they abound with vocabulary centred on love, Jesus' love for human beings and the love that each person aspires to in their relationships. This love is expressed in terms of 'compassion', of 'communion' but gradually, one of these terms becomes omnipresent: communion.

The use of the word 'communion' is far more prevalent in the second edition of *Community and Growth* than in the first, where it is almost absent. This is even more striking in the book *Each person is a sacred history* where the word 'communion' features over 250 times, much more than 'love' or 'unity'.

Communion, defined as a relationship of mutual trust, is a fundamental human aspiration from birth. Jean Vanier uses the expression 'consciousness of love' to describe the love of an infant, which comes from the thinking of Thomas Philippe.

This extrapolation suggests communion as a lost paradise to be found again. Hence, the significance of becoming like a 'little child' again in order to rediscover communion. In a retreat, Jean Vanier disagreed with psychologists who refused to talk about very young children as a source of love. On the contrary, he insisted on this 'trusting love', a kind of love that 'we have lost'.

For Jean Vanier, communion was superior to action, and central to his spirituality and his anthropology: 'Father Thomas considered this relationship of communion, the founding principle of any relational life, as essential to understanding spiritual life and the life of faith. He helped me place communion at the heart of my anthropology.'

In his more spiritual writings, one again finds the 'nuptial' and fusal tendency mentioned above. Communion becomes 'marriage' and 'nuptial'. He portrays Jesus as the Bridegroom, the Beloved, 'to enfold each person in the embrace of love' and 'the Bride, wounded by love,' as crying out 'in her whole flesh her thirst for the presence of the Beloved, the Spouse, in order to receive his love and to give herself to him entirely.'

Is this use of the term 'communion' typical in Thomas Philippe's writing? On this point, the Commission must refer to the analysis to be made by the Dominicans. It suffices here to quote Xavier Le Pichon, who confirms the significance of this aspect: 'Father Thomas began to write a lot. He was no longer just a commentator on saint Thomas. He reconstructed his theology. He began to have this new vision of the raw material, of the body, as if he had freed himself from being the disciple of saint 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.'

Only extensive research on the content of the word 'communion' in Thomas Philippe's work will permit us to go further. But the conclusion is obvious: that is exactly where we need to look next!

CHAPTER 24

A 'Carmelite' mysticism?

There is no need to have heard the revelations about Thomas Philippe's perverted mystical spirituality to identify the mystical tone prevalent in Jean Vanier's books. The tone is intentionally Carmelite, given the regular references to saint John of the Cross and saint Teresa of Avila and the occasional reference to saint Thérèse de Lisieux. The usual Scriptural references of these mystics are also present, especially the *Song of Songs* and the Gospel of saint John. It seems to us that in the end, mysticism reinforced Jean Vanier's desire for fusional communion with God – and with people within the scope of shared faith. Jean Vanier's deep mysticism facilitated his rupture with rationality and his lack of attention to the 'other' as a separate individual.

The study of the writings of Jean Vanier presented in the Commission's report demonstrates that the mystical life was his intimate 'secret'. The tone is frequently ecstatic. This raises questions and reveals a deviation from the Carmelite tradition which attaches so much importance to the purification of the senses. Teresa of Avila warned readers that the comparison of the sacrament of marriage to spiritual marriage was 'a crude 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 satisfaction two spouses must enjoy.'

Nevertheless, Jean Vanier seemed convinced that he was living a mystical union: a 'nuptial', 'marriage', 'spiritual marriage' with God. Jean Vanier was consistent and did not refer to any other mystical model of the Christian tradition: his only reference was indeed to Carmelite mysticism, essentially to Saint John of the Cross.

This assumption seems coherent given its double origin. Jean Vanier evoked the Carmelite roots of his father who was an assiduous reader of saint John of Cross and Thérèse de Lisieux. His second source of Carmelite heritage was his spiritual father, Thomas Philippe. The forthcoming analysis made by the Dominicans will reveal more about Thomas Philippe's teachings on saint John of the Cross. It is highly likely that his erroneous interpretation will shed light on some of Jean Vanier's remarks.

Over time, Jean Vanier tried to offer a mystical approach, independent of religion, focusing on encounters with the poor, who could reveal us to ourselves and open us up to an encounter with God. This mysticism became a new 'wisdom' for the transformation of the world. This shift from a Carmelite mysticism to a universal mysticism is astonishing. Why 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 reasoned arguments, Jean Vanier's discourse proves to be elusive, disjointed and not very credible on the rational or the theological level.

CHAPTER 25

A persistent affiliation to Thomas Philippe?

In almost all his prefaces, Jean Vanier addressed a word of gratitude to his 'spiritual father' Thomas Philippe, with whom he said he founded L'Arche. This autobiographical remark in his works is interesting in view of what the Commission has brought to light. References to his spiritual father recur often and confirm the very deep bond that united them. In *Each person is a sacred history*, he recounts how Thomas Philippe invited him to Trosly in 1963: '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 with a destiny and a mission'.

In the same book, he talked about his own qualities as a 'strong and effective' leader, admitting he was sometimes overbearing and hurtful towards his colleagues. He described how his exercise of authority evolved, but that he had always been insecure when confronted with opposing opinions. He also recounted numerous fears and anxieties. His greatest fear was of abandonment, of being betrayed, but also of betraying others: 'One of the greatest bereavements of life, is the bereavement of honour, the fact of being despised or seen as someone who has betrayed a cause.' This statement from 1994 refers to a statement reported by one of his biographers in 2015: 'To deny Father Thomas would have been like committing suicide'. The almost Christ-like role of Thomas Philippe and the absence of the personal call of Jesus in his stories about his conversion are astonishing.

In several works, Jean Vanier appealed to mystical tradition of saint John of the Cross or the Thomistic tradition in a distorted way to support his own convictions, both to exonerate his master and to justify his own silence. His words are so ambiguous that it is sometimes difficult to know whom he was really addressing. Was there an underlying message for the small group of 'initiates' as distinct from all other readers?

The report presents several examples of this double level of language. The possibility of deliberately ambiguous writing, addressing a wide audience but also 'the initiates', appears highly probable, especially in his early publications. For example: 'Jesus is not just any prophet [...] His words are important, but even more important is his person, his heart and his body. It was his body, through its intelligence alone, that radiated the perfection of divine force. It is in his body, a channel perfectly docile to grace, that he was in total receptivity to the power and love of the Father.'

This rehabilitation of the body can be understood through an anthropological perspective which counters the long-standing devaluation of the body among Christians. This aspect could unfortunately also have served as a support for the 'initiates' who had erotic spiritual practices. If the body were considered a privileged channel for grace, it would be easy to justify numerous gestures between a spiritual father and the people he accompanied. 'Perfect docility' was indeed required during physical touching, particularly by Thomas Philippe, according to the testimony of women accompanied and abused by him.

The wheat and the chaff

This critical analysis of Jean Vanier's books leads us to observe that he operated on two distinct levels. The first was based on an intimate, secret mysticism related to 'spiritual marriage' with the aberrations mentioned above. The second was based on a spirituality of commitment to the 'poor', giving them a key role in the conversion of each person and in the transformation of our relationships in society.

The two levels meet, as if gradually unified under the term communion, communicating but never coinciding. No mysticism was shared with the 'poor' despite their sacred role, representing Jesus himself. Communion with them was not mystical in the sense given by Jean Vanier, that is, as a nuptial union. It was essentially emotional, psychological, human.

This raises another question. Why didn't Jean Vanier ever develop the spirituality of people with disabilities? He recognised their spiritual depth by claiming, in his usual vocabulary, that they possess a 'consciousness of love rather than a rational consciousness'. He did not, however, explore what they could share with us about faith, Christian or otherwise. Paradoxically, what slipped in here was a form of denial of the existence of an original spirituality marked by the seal of the experience of disability.

At times, the two levels –intimate spirituality and spirituality of commitment – do meet. For instance, in the way he envisioned formation for assistants. Jean Vanier was very attached to a filiation-oriented accompaniment, which assumed 'communion' with a 'model' accompanier. This bond then became a place of possible abuse.

His anti-intellectualism probably hampered multidisciplinary reflection at L'Arche. Although Jean Vanier gave consideration to the psychological dimension, especially necessary in the accompaniment of 'wounded' people, he played on the confusion between the mystical and the spiritual without ever questioning it. This confusion unfortunately contributed to the process of psychological control over the people he accompanied.

It is strange to see the blindness of even highly competent intellectuals and theologians who never questioned the substance of Jean Vanier's teachings. This silence may have led people to believe there was nothing wrong. This form of approval was consolidated by the well-known links between Jean Vanier and many of the Church's well-known figures.

Was Jean Vanier trying to pass on Thomas Philippe's esoteric teaching in his written work? Answering this requires distinctions. On the one hand, the primary aim of his books was to inspire the vocation of living in community with 'wounded' people. They value the blessing that the *tout petits* represent and rightly question the way we live in society and in the Church. On the other hand, the most visible elements of Thomas Philippe's teachings in Jean Vanier's works concern anthropology, 'the consciousness of love' of the very young, the importance of touch, and of tenderness in the relationship between parents and infants. These elements are omnipresent in Jean Vanier's books and are indeed inherited from Thomas Philippe, though rarely referenced as such. Yet, this anthropological core is essential to the doctrine in which body and sexuality are involved in a mysticism centred on nuptial union. This is precisely where Jean Vanier most clearly showed 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.

Although heir to Thomas Philippe's thinking, Jean Vanier invented his own spiritual path, mixed with psychology, creating a form of universal mysticism that did not eliminate the perspective of a nuptial communion. It is therefore reasonable to say that he inherited a way of thinking and living in communion favourable to spiritual and sexual abuse, especially during accompaniment, rather than a structured religious education faithful to Thomas Philippe. Jean Vanier did 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, falsifying the tradition of Carmelite mysticism.

In the final analysis, it is difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff in each of Jean Vanier's books. They demonstrate the human complexity of this founding figure whose harmful dimension cannot be denied.

The theological view of the Commission's report invites us to look to the future by further exploring the original and enriching experience of L'Arche communities. This can take many directions: continuing to build the spirituality lived within L'Arche based on the experience of living together with people with disabilities; fostering the cross-disciplinary development of this experience by embracing all dimensions of vulnerable people; envisaging a sharing of knowledge between assistants, people with disabilities and intellectuals on themes that concern all members of L'Arche communities.

Conclusion

The dossier is heavy. The diagnosis may seem harsh, but it is now substantiated.

After more than two years of investigation, the Commission was able to analyse the mechanisms deployed by Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier: influence, sexual abuse, collective delusions, deviations from concepts at the heart of Christianity, incestuous representations of the relationship between Jesus and Mary...

The incredible persistence of a decades-long perverse core from 1950 to 2019 raises questions. The sanctions adopted by the Church in 1956 did not produce the expected results. A culture of secrecy and lies explains the truncated and reformulated accounts of the story of Eau Vive and the founding of L'Arche. The support of a respectable and well-off family with a high-level social network contributed to the manipulation of the Catholic hierarchy. The gaps in communication between the various authorities of the Church are obvious, although it is necessary to recognize the difficulty that any institution has in keeping track of the facts, and in maintaining a high level of vigilance over such a long period of time. Nevertheless, the non-disclosure of the exact causes of the condemnation of Thomas Philippe by the Holy Office is precisely what allowed him to maintain his reputation for holiness and to rewrite history as he pleased. Lastly, the rapid development of L'Arche and, consequently, of Jean Vanier's fame, constituted a final essential explanatory factor.

Contrary to what the accounts of the founding of L'Arche say, there was no 'revelation' defining the founding moment. The primary intention, which from December 1963, pushed Jean Vanier and the former members of Eau Vive to plan to settle in Trosly-Breuil, was to gather around Thomas Philippe, whose release from restrictions they had been waiting for since 1956. The 'mystical-sexual' beliefs they received from him were the cement that pushed them to re-found a project. If their choice to turn to people with disabilities appears in this perspective as a 'screen' for this reunion, it coexisted from the start with a sincere intention to devote themselves to people with disabilities. The 'providential' opportunity that presented itself thanks to Dr. Préaut, was consistent with the orientation of 'les tout petits' towards the 'poor par excellence', who would be preserved from intellectual pride by their limited ability to reason. By welcoming people with intellectual disabilities from August 1964 onwards, they were confronted with a radically new otherness: that of these people, whose support required the acquisition of professional skills; also that of the public authorities who were financing their admission and who therefore imposed legal frameworks and exercised a right of control.

The elements of the founding story must be placed in the context of this coming together. Jean Vanier says he heard, like a call, 'the primal cry of people with disabilities'. Coming first to join Thomas Philippe, he entered, with the founding of L'Arche, into an unexpected dynamic, and embarked on a path, the fruitfulness of which he could not have anticipated.

The report of the Commission attests that Jean Vanier reproduced with many women the mystical-sexual relations that Thomas Philippe had conceived. Without all of them necessarily describing themselves as victims, the women who testified underline the confusion between the spiritual, affective and sexual planes, which characterized the relationship. The analysis of Jean Vanier's writings indicates the presence of strong continuities with the 'theology' of Thomas Philippe. How are we supposed to understand this?

If the original nucleus of this sect indeed formed a microsystem at the heart of L'Arche, in the light of the facts of abuse identified by the Commission, it does not seem to have developed further. The limited diffusion of the sect's core and its exhaustion within L'Arche can be explained by several factors: the rapid development of the communities; the arrival of numerous people with varying backgrounds and motivations; and the elements mentioned above (checks by the public authorities, the presence of external professionals).

However, the results of the survey call for vigilance. If, in its present state of knowledge, the Commission observes that none of the people that Jean Vanier 'initiated' (abused) reproduced in their own turn these mystical-sexual practices, patterns of influence 'in imitation of Jean Vanier', particularly in his mode of exercising authority, may have existed and perhaps still exist in L'Arche.

The last abusive relationships known to the Commission date back to the mid-2000s, and since 2014 a process of individual and collective awareness has been developing within L'Arche. The mandate given to this Commission to establish these facts is one striking sign of this. However, the Commission urges caution: it is well-known that the process of speaking out can be slow for victims. The Commission was motivated by the desire to try to understand the mechanisms at work. But an even greater motivation was their conviction that such behaviour can only be eradicated if it is exposed to the light of day.