



# Summary Report

from L'Arche International

- February 22, 2020 -

# Summary Report from L'Arche International

February 22, 2020

## PREFACE

L'Arche International wishes to make the findings of the recent investigation public and at the same time protect the confidentiality of the women who testified, so we have created the following summary from the full report by GCPS and the historical work by Antoine Mourges. This summary report has been submitted to and deemed to be accurate by the authors of the original reports (GCPS and Antoine Mourges) as well as by the two members of the inquiry's Oversight Committee.

## BACKGROUND

In 2014, the first allegations of sexual abuse by Father Thomas Philippe dating back to the founding of L'Arche until the end of his life, were sent to the leaders of L'Arche International. (Thomas Philippe died in 1993). At the request of the L'Arche international leaders at that time, Monseigneur d'Ornellas commissioned a canonical inquiry into these allegations in late 2014. The inquiry listened to victims of Father Philippe and concluded that the allegations were substantiated. In 2015 the canonical inquiry made the following conclusion:

*"These consistent and sincere testimonies show that Father Thomas Philippe had sexual relations with women of legal age, through which he said he was seeking and communicating a mystical experience; however, they are very serious at odds with the religious vows he had taken and with the discipline and morals taught by the Church; they demonstrate a psychological and spiritual hold on these women from whom he demanded silence, because according to him this corresponded to " special graces " that no one could understand. "*<sup>1</sup>

Given the fact that Father Thomas Philippe had already been sanctioned by the Church authorities in 1956, the question was raised about what Jean Vanier and other L'Arche members may have known about these cases of abuse. The issue was raised directly with Jean Vanier by the L'Arche International leaders, resulting in public statements made by Jean Vanier in May 2015 and October 2016 when he essentially stated he was not aware of Father Thomas Philippe's behavior.

In 2016, L'Arche leaders received an allegation from a woman who questioned Jean Vanier's behavior towards her in the 1970s. This allegation was thoroughly investigated. While Vanier acknowledged the relationship, he stated that he believed the relationship to have been "reciprocal".

Then, in March 2019 towards the end of Jean Vanier's life, L'Arche International received another similar allegation and decided to launch an independent inquiry.

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter from L'Arche International Leaders – March 24, 2015

## **INQUIRY AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH**

GCPS Consulting, a UK-based group with expertise in the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), was selected for this work for their experience in such investigations and policy development with major international non-governmental organizations. GCPS was engaged in April 2019. Director Paul Nolan, and Senior Associate Ester Dross, who conducted this work.

In addition, L'Arche International established an Independent Oversight Committee and asked two people who had previously held senior positions in public administration in France to review the integrity and reliability of the investigation process and its findings. They concurred with the findings on February 11, 2020 and consider the conclusions of the investigation to be well-founded.

In June 2019, L'Arche International gained access to the archives of the Dominicans in Paris and to some of Jean Vanier's unpublished personal archives following his death.

In June 2019, L'Arche International Leader, Stephan Posner commissioned Antoine Mourges, an historian, to produce a paper on the prehistory of L'Arche from 1950 (when Jean Vanier met Thomas Philippe) to 1964 (the founding of L'Arche) and the links between Vanier and Philippe. This work was reviewed by several experts, including Michel Fourcade, Lecturer (HDR) of contemporary history at the University Paul-Valéry Montpellier III and specialist in religious history of the twentieth century.

In the course of the inquiry GCPS received further allegations involving Jean Vanier.

L'Arche International submitted GCPS's report and historical work by Antoine Mourges to the Independent Church Sexual Abuse Commission (CIASE). This commission is tasked with investigating cases of abuse in the Church in France.

The decision to launch this work and to share its conclusions has been approved by the International Leadership Team and the Stewardship Board of L'Arche International.

## **GENERAL SCOPE AND OBJECTIVE OF INQUIRY**

L'Arche International launched this inquiry to investigate historical allegations, to better understand current safeguarding risks and to review current responses.

The inquiry focused on:

1. The alleged relationships between Jean Vanier and a few women
2. Jean Vanier's relationship with Father Thomas Philippe
3. Jean Vanier's response to situations of abuse that were brought to his attention.

The goal was to clarify the facts, understand the context and to report on the findings.

The inquiry team acknowledges that the fact that Jean Vanier is deceased presents difficulties to any inquiry but does not diminish any of the basic principles that accompany such work, including its impartiality and objectivity and the right of the person who is the subject of a complaint to give a response.

Following the 2014 canonical inquiry into Father Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier was offered opportunities to respond. He was questioned by L'Arche International leaders regarding his knowledge of Father Thomas Philippe's theories and sexual practices, and the 2016 allegation about his own behavior and any similar relationships he might have had with other women.

### **Allegations Received by Inquiry Team**

The inquiry team received six allegations from alleged victims and directly interviewed five of the women.

The team also reviewed statements and interviews from more than 30 other people in addition to the alleged victims, including former leaders and staff both from L'Arche and external to L'Arche and experts who had been involved in the past.

### **SOURCE MATERIAL FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH**

A comprehensive volume of source material, much of it previously unavailable, was collected in the course of Antoine Mourgès' work, including Dominican archives of the Province of France, where there are files concerning L'Eau Vive<sup>2</sup> and the two brothers Marie Dominique and Thomas Philippe. This documentary evidence allowed him to establish a precise chronology of the events during the period 1952-1956 and to have a clear picture of the facts specifically as they relate to the statements of earlier victims.

Documents are more limited for the period 1956-1970. This gap is made up for by Jean Vanier's personal archives, containing 277 documents, mostly in the form of letters, (out of which 184 are from Father Thomas Philippe) which allow a more complete story to emerge.

In responses transmitted on December 7, 2019, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the Vatican (formerly the Holy Office and whose archives relating to the trial of Father Thomas Philippe are not yet accessible for research) confirmed or completed certain elements contained in the archives studied.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

#### **Standard of proof**

Any conclusions of an administrative review of this kind are based on a "balance of probabilities" and not "beyond any doubt" standard of proof. Considering the available evidence, the inquiry team reached determinations based on whether events and allegations presented to it are "more likely than not" to have occurred. The inquiry did not seek to establish whether or not any of the alleged incidents or events might represent possible criminal breaches and took no view on this.

---

<sup>2</sup> No link with L'Eau Vive founded by Father Monteynard in France

## **Credibility of witnesses**

The inquiry team found that the alleged victims, who were not linked to each other and had no knowledge of their respective stories, had each undergone a process of serious personal reflection. Although deeply affected by the events of the past, they were both humble and without any hatred or desire for revenge. They each explained that they had come forward to tell their stories as a way of confronting the past, and to help L'Arche to reflect on the past and to avoid any similar events in the future.

### **1. The alleged relationships between Jean Vanier and a number of women**

In addition to those who called into question Jean Vanier's conduct, as part of the inquiry other women were interviewed. All of them described their relationships with Jean Vanier. While some spoke positively, others described abusive behavior, whereby they had placed their trust in Vanier and he had used his power over them to take advantage of them through different kinds of sexual behaviors.

The inquiry team investigated a number of allegations of sexual assault all from women who were adult and not people with disabilities. The relationships involved various kinds of sexual behavior often combined with so called "mystical and spiritual" justifications for this conduct. The relationships were alleged to have taken place under conditions the inquiry team label as "psychological hold" and are described as emotionally abusive and characterised by significant imbalances of power, whereby the alleged victims felt deprived of their free will and so the sexual activity was coerced or took place under coercive conditions. This includes allegations that some of the sexual activity took place within the context of spiritual accompaniment whereby Jean Vanier as a person of significant power and authority would offer guidance to certain assistants he chose to accompany. Several of the women stated that they were vulnerable at the time and Jean Vanier was aware of this.

The inquiry team received credible and corroborating accounts, covering a period of more than 30 years (1970 to 2005), from various alleged victims. They varied in terms of their geographic origin, age, status (single, married, vowed celibate), and the time frame covered by their statements. However, they all describe similar events, providing sufficient evidence to establish that Jean Vanier engaged in manipulative sexual relationships with at least 6 adult (not disabled) women. This number does not presume that there were no other cases, but takes into account spontaneously received testimony.

This finding is also supported by documentary and testimonial evidence that establishes Jean Vanier knew about and also displayed the same sexually inappropriate behavior demonstrated by Father Thomas Philippe. The evidence shows that:

- Jean Vanier, as with Father Thomas Philippe, crossed boundaries which are expected and necessary when people are in a relationship of trust, for example being spiritually accompanied by either a priest or a person of authority.
- Jean Vanier had relationships with women, some of which were inappropriate at least and were formed under conditions of psychological hold.
- For some of the women, these relationships were experienced as coercive and non-consensual in nature.
- All of the women described how the behavior had a subsequent long-lasting, negative impact on their personal lives and inter-personal and/or spousal relationships.
- Most of the women have received psychosocial support for years to overcome the consequences of the abuse they described.

All alleged victims described their own vulnerability at the time of the events, sometimes coming from difficult family backgrounds or looking for a father figure, or looking for admiration and recognition and/or seeking spiritual guidance. They also describe significant barriers to raising these issues, given the charismatic personality of Jean Vanier and his predominant position within L'Arche.

The following quotes are taken from the inquiry describing Jean Vanier's behavior (names and dates were not provided to prevent potential identification):

- *I was in an inappropriate sexual relationship with Jean Vanier. Was I consenting? I think at the beginning yes, but as time went on, the more I believe that I was not consenting.*
- *In 19XX, when in Trosly, I was very upset (about a personal issue). I was very upset and very vulnerable. (.....) He told me to come late (for spiritual direction). We prayed, I got an invitation to meet him in (xxxx). It was very intimate, he did everything except intercourse. (...)*
- *I was like frozen, I realised that Jean Vanier was adored by hundreds of people, like a living Saint, that he talked about how he helped victims of sexual abuse, it appeared like a camouflage and I found it difficult to raise the issue.*
- *I think it was in 19XX, when the spiritual accompaniment transformed into sexual touching. I told him I had a lover, he said that it was important to distinguish (what happened between us) referring to the Song of Solomon. It went on for 3 or 4 years. Each time, I was frozen, I was unable to distinguish what was right and what was wrong. (.....) He told me that this was part of the accompaniment.*
- *He said: "This is not us, this is Mary and Jesus. You are chosen, you are special, this is secret."*
- *In 19XX, (...) I decided to go and see Father Thomas to seek his advice. I wanted to talk about (...) our secret with Jean Vanier.(...) He told me to come and see him at 22h00. I knocked at the door. There was a curtain, and he sat on the bed. Before I could start talking about Jean Vanier, it started with him, the same as with Jean Vanier. He was not tender like Jean Vanier. More brutal, no intercourse, same words to say that I am special and that all this is about Jesus and Mary.*
- *When I expressed my astonishment saying (...) how could I manifest my love to Jesus and to him, he replied: "But Jesus and myself, this is not two, but we are one. (...) It is Jesus who loves you through me."*

According to witness statements, even though they shared their suffering and the long-term impact of his behavior with Jean Vanier, he did not demonstrate that he understood or acknowledged their suffering.

- *So in 20XX, I wrote to Jean Vanier to say that it was unbearable what he had done to me and still is today. I wanted to make sure he read this letter, so I gave it to him in person. He read it; he told me: I thought it was good. He didn't tell me anything else.*
- *Yes, what I told you about the young woman and the husband (she was invited by Jean Vanier to lie with him on the bed, she told her husband who was angry with Jean Vanier), it nearly broke their marriage but he didn't understand and all he could say was that the husband was unreasonably angry.*

## 2. Jean Vanier's relationship with Father Thomas Philippe

### Birth of a bond

Father Thomas Philippe created l'Eau Vive in 1946 as a "school of wisdom" and an international training centre. Its main objective was to offer teaching of Thomistic theology as well as an initiation to the contemplative life.

Jean Vanier arrived at l'Eau-Vive in September 1950. At the age of 22, he came following several years in the Navy, after a childhood and adolescence marked by his mother's depression, by moving around due to his father's diplomatic life and by the beginning of the Second World War. He arrived at l'Eau-Vive, animated by a spiritual quest and questions about his priestly vocation.

A spiritual bond of filiation was quickly established between Jean Vanier and Father Thomas Philippe. Questioned in 2009, Jean Vanier replied:

*It was obvious to him that I was his spiritual son who would do anything to support him in his plans. The others were people who were already involved in things, projects. They were set, came for a limited time, while I was on a quest and nothing was set for my future.<sup>3</sup>*

Jean Vanier positioned himself as having been formed spiritually and intellectually by his relationship with Father Thomas Philippe, more than by the studies he was able to do (theology and philosophy):

*Father Thomas' theology gave me strong and solid principles. I've never really looked for one anywhere else. If people find that I am very free in my intellectual life, even in an interpretation of the Gospel of St. John and in the development of an anthropology that is close to human and spiritual reality, it is because I am steeped in the thought and method of Father Thomas<sup>4</sup>*

### The investigation and conviction of Father Thomas Philippe

At the very beginning of 1952, Thomas Philippe still seemed to be successfully pursuing his career as a theologian and spiritual master. However, two women - who were victims of his abuse - alerted some Dominican priests in the province of France as early as May 1951. After a quick assessment, it was clear that the facts were serious. In April 1952, this process led to the withdrawal of Father Thomas Philippe from l'Eau-Vive, which he then left for good.

Father Thomas Philippe appointed Jean Vanier to replace him as the director of L'Eau Vive, despite his age and inexperience.

In the following days the Master General of the Dominican Order became aware of the magnitude of the matter and placed it in the hands of the Holy Office (now the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). During the investigation phase, Father Thomas Philippe was forbidden to confess and to give spiritual direction and was kept in various more or less secret places. He was forbidden to continue exercising an influence on l'Eau Vive and therefore forbidden to see its members without

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview of J. Vanier by A. Mourges, January 2009.

<sup>4</sup> K. Spink p. 53

authorization. To this end, his correspondence was monitored by the superiors of the religious houses where he was located.

Despite being categorically banned from doing so, Thomas Philippe continued to run l'Eau Vive clandestinely throughout the investigation period. The dozens of letters he sent to Jean Vanier during this period show that he advised and guided him in all the steps to be taken. Braving the ban (which he could not ignore as he later said), Jean Vanier met him many times during this period.

The Dominican archives contain the statements of the two victims of Father Thomas Philippe who sounded the alarm. It describes the behavior of Father Thomas Philippe but also his justification for his behavior:

*Then he began theories, to try to convince me, [...]: the lost woman of Hosea, the sacrifice of Abraham, the glorious mysteries, the transcendence of the prophetic mission (of his mission) regarding the norms of morality. He asked me, most insistently, to bind myself to him by an act of absolute faith in this mission and in himself. I replied that I could only make an act of faith in God alone, and trust in creatures only insofar as they were God's instrument for me [...]. He explained to me that it was not for me to make this discrimination, that he was an instrument of God, and therefore at present and directly moved by God [...].*

*He said that I lacked strength, that I had to get used to it gradually, that all this was a great honour to Our Lord and to the Blessed Virgin, because the sexual organs were the symbol of the greatest love, much more than the Sacred Heart -. And I said, "but that's blasphemy!" Then he took up his theories again, saying that when one arrives at perfect love, everything is lawful, for there is no more sin<sup>5</sup>*

### **Jean Vanier's knowledge of the reasons for the 1956 canonical trial and the conviction of Father Thomas Philippe**

The canonical trial ended in 1956 condemning Father Thomas Philippe to a sentence of deposition. The punishment of deposition is one of the most severe penalties provided for in canon law (1917). It deprived Father Thomas Philippe of his capacity to carry out any public or private ministry: celebration of the sacraments, spiritual direction, preaching, etc.

The Secretary of the "Holy Congregation of the Holy Office" indicated in a letter of May 28, 1956 announcing the conclusions of the trial, that all those close to Thomas Philippe who were still defending him *"should be enlightened by you on the condemnation by the Church of the conduct and "mystical doctrine" of Father Thomas Philippe<sup>6</sup>".*

In his letter, he also reported two measures aimed at l'Eau Vive and the laity there. The first was the closure of the community and the dispersal of the group, with the definitive prohibition of its reformation in another place.

---

<sup>5</sup> 'Rapport de juin 1952' III O 59 Eau Vive 2 L'affaire (ADPF)

<sup>6</sup> Official letter from Cardinal Pizzardo, Secretary of the Congregation of the Holy Office, to Father Ducattillon, May 28, 1956, III O



The second one said:

*All the lay accomplices of Father Thomas Philippe, in particular (.....) as well as Mr. Jean Vanier, should be enlightened by you on the condemnation by the Church of the conduct and of the "mystical" doctrine of Father Thomas Philippe<sup>7</sup>.*

A second official letter was sent the next day to give some details about Jean Vanier and the "last resisters" of l'Eau Vive:

*1° There can be no question of delaying the execution of the measures concerning the departure of Jean Vanier and the female staff from l'"Eau Vive". It would no doubt even be advisable for "L'Eau Vive" to know fairly soon that Father Thomas Philippe was subject to a very serious condemnation by the Holy Office and that he has withdrawn. It will thus be understood that the measures concerning them are the only logical consequences of this conviction. It seems to me that the time has come, for these poor lost souls, to provide them with the charity of full light. [...]*

*4° With regard to Jean Vanier, he (Secretary of the Holy Office) wishes that, when you enlighten him (Jean Vanier) on Father Thomas Philippe, you inform him, in the name of the Holy Office, that he cannot be ordained a priest before having spent several years in a seminary and that he will be forbidden to devote himself to "L'Eau Vive" or to any foundation of this Center.<sup>8</sup>*

About ten days later, a letter from Father Ducatillon specified:

*Yesterday morning, I was able to see Jean Vanier in particular. I communicated to him the two other obligations that are required of him: to no longer participate in any activity of "L'Eau Vive" and that of spending several years of seminary before being ordained a priest. I also told him what I thought was necessary to enlighten him. He had already been informed, he told me, by you and by Father Garrigou<sup>9</sup>.*

And in another letter addressed by Father Paul Philippe on June 20, 1956:

*I was very awed by the reaction of those involved, by Jean Vanier, the people from l'Eau Vive and the nuns from Bouvines. Wouldn't Father Thomas have raised the alarm? I confess to you that I would be almost more inclined to severely judge the disciples rather than the master: the latter is, certainly in part, irresponsible. But a Jean Vanier, a Mother Cecile? A Father Marie-Dominique? they knew, and they wanted to cover up everything, "not to judge"<sup>10</sup>...*

While in 1956 there was no longer any doubt that Jean Vanier was informed of the reasons for the condemnation of Father Thomas Philippe, another archival document also refers to an earlier interview in May 1952 during which Father Avril, Provincial of France, spoke to him about the actions of Father Thomas Philippe:

*During this interview Father Provincial spoke to him in unspeakable terms about Father Philippe's morality<sup>11</sup>.*

---

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Fr. Paul Philippe to Fr. Ducatillon, 29 May 1956, III O 59 Eau Vive 2 " L'affaire ", ADPF.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Fr. Ducatillon to Fr. Paul Philippe, 10 June 1956, III O 59 Eau Vive 2 " L'affaire ", ADPF.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Fr. Paul Philippe to Fr. Ducatillon, 20 June 1956, III O 59 Eau Vive 2 " L'affaire ", ADPF.

<sup>11</sup> "Rapport justificatif des dirigeants laïcs de l'Eau Vive ", 1954, III O 59 Eau Vive 2 " L'affaire ", ADPF.

### **The role of Jean Vanier in the group of followers of Father Thomas Philippe**

Against the advice of the Church, between 1952 and 1964, Father Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier maintained a deep bond. Letters from this period reveal the extent of Father Thomas Philippe's influence on Vanier's thinking and behavior. They also report on the visits Jean Vanier made to him and how he helped him meet clandestinely with the women of Eau Vive. Jean Vanier was a key member of the group.

### **Jean Vanier's relationship with some of the women in this group**

In all the letters kept by Jean Vanier, a series of indicators lead us to believe that he shared sexual practices similar to those of Father Thomas Philippe with several women, none of whom seem to have declared themselves as victims. Some of them he met at l'Eau Vive, others later.

In these letters addressed to him by these women, the interplay between a "love" dimension, "mystical" remarks and the evocation of physical contact, is in line with what is known about the sexual theories and practices of Father Thomas Philippe and those of Jean Vanier revealed by the allegations recently brought to the attention of the inquiry.

Some letters from Father Thomas Philippe sent him advice on precautionary measures and rules of conduct:

*For XX be very careful. You can sometimes pray with her, if it is very prudent; but externally the minimum, no more than St John at the Last Supper and in a rather discreet way. I feel that the Blessed Virgin asks us to be very careful about this point. Rely on obedience. Even if XX [...] and you are very much in a hurry internally, you must remain below this limit rather than go beyond it... Mary may want to test your obedience<sup>12</sup>*

The group of the followers of Father Thomas Philippe was moving forward with extreme prudence, but also with constant attention to the opportunities that arose and to the evolution of the environment. Little by little, Father Thomas Philippe's letters show that he was anxious to re-establish a public and official link with Jean Vanier.

In 1963, Jean Vanier helped Father Thomas Philippe to physically install his house in Trosly-Breuil and joined him a few months later. Very quickly, several of the women in the small group followed him to find Thomas Philippe, and they were involved to varying degrees in the founding of L'Arche.

In the period that followed, Thomas Philippe gradually resumed his priestly and apostolic activities, beginning again to confess and to accompany men, then women.

### **3. Jean Vanier's responses to situations of abuse that have been brought to his attention.**

Because Jean Vanier did not denounce the theories and practices of Father Thomas Philippe of which Jean Vanier was personally aware as early as the 1950s, it was possible, for Father Thomas Philippe to continue his sexual abuse of women in L'Arche and it allowed Father Thomas Philippe to expand his spiritual influence on founders and members of other communities.

---

<sup>12</sup> Undated Letter from Thomas Philippe to Jean Vanier, summer or end of year 1958, E2/F3/D18, JVA

The investigation heard allegations that Jean Vanier was aware of other situations of psychological or sexual abuse of L'Arche assistants by another person. Despite Jean Vanier's denials when questioned by L'Arche International officials, his knowledge of at least some of the facts seems to be proven.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Following the findings of this inquiry by GCPS, their forthcoming recommendations and the historical research that has been undertaken, L'Arche International will continue this work, including looking any issues which were not within the scope of the current inquiry.

Moving forward L'Arche International is committed to reviewing arrangements for ensuring the safety and well-being of all members and with external consultation, will evaluate current safeguarding performance across the federation, including identifying any risks and the steps needed to address those risks. L'Arche is committed to improving safeguarding practice including addressing any gaps in policy, procedures and practice.

In addition to the reporting procedures already in place in local settings, L'Arche International has set up a reporting procedure that can be accessed in a secure and confidential manner. Any concerns or reports that are received through this process will be addressed by a small team that includes external expertise.