

**Report on the respective roles
of Jean Vanier and Père Thomas
in the foundation of L'Arche**

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Introduction and perspective provided by Patrick Fontaine and Eileen Glass

In our letter to L'Arche Community Leaders in April 2015, we spoke of how shaken we were by the conclusions of the enquiry following the testimonies received concerning Père Thomas' misconduct. We affirm our strong condemnation of the evidence that has come to light, aware of the gravity of the impact on the lives of the victims. We reaffirm our regret and compassion for all those concerned.

We also spoke in this letter about our conviction that such behaviour would inevitably lead us to take a new look at Père Thomas Philippe's contribution to L'Arche's development.

Since that time, among the various measures taken within the federation subsequent to the revelations, several initiatives have been launched in an attempt to better understand Père Thomas' personality, the nature of his works and his contribution to the foundation of L'Arche.

One of these initiatives, a collection of testimonies from the main witnesses of this foundation period, was entrusted to Dominique Le Cardinal and Hubert Allier with a view to helping us to determine the respective roles and place of Jean Vanier and Père Thomas Philippe in the foundation of L'Arche.

This report is therefore the fruit of their work and contributes to understanding of our history. Although we are aware that this work relies on the subjective and partial perceptions of these witnesses, we welcome it with considerable interest.

It provides an insight, in particular into Père Thomas, which may, in many respects, appear troubling or even shocking when one is aware of his misconduct, which is not itself the subject of this report.

However, this troubling insight also reveals the reality of a split personality, as testified by the psychologists who we questioned.

Denis Vaginay, a psychologist and psychoanalyst, wrote to us:

"One of the characteristics of this pathology is to use the divide. Contradictory or even incompatible elements coexist within the psyche, unaware of one another. This means they live autonomous, separate lives and may express themselves in the form of different personalities, which appear according to who the individual is speaking to".

This report also confronts us with this reality.

Although this work could not be described as a historical piece of research, this collection of testimonies also helps us to better pinpoint the respective roles of Jean and Père Thomas in the foundation of L'Arche, which was our main expectation for this report.

On behalf of L'Arche, we are therefore deeply grateful to Hubert and Dominique, for the competence, rigour and considerable time that they have devoted to this task.

Their conclusions are presented below.

Timeline and Methodology

1.

In November 2015, Eileen Glass and Patrick Fontaine, International Leaders of L'Arche, entrusted us with the task of listening to and compiling statements from people who were witnesses to the foundation of L'Arche. Here is an excerpt from the mission letter that we received in November 2015:

Context

Numerous accounts of the history of L'Arche unanimously underline the significant contribution Père Thomas Philippe made to the pre-history and beginning of L'Arche: his influence was decisive in Jean Vanier's spiritual journey and in his call to found the first community.

In April 2015, the results of the canonical enquiry concerning Père Thomas revealed that he was guilty of recurrent reprehensible acts towards adult women during spiritual accompaniment. These acts (through which he sought to live and communicate a mystical experience) were accompanied by a psychological and spiritual hold over these women.

The gravity of these offences led L'Arche to re-examine Père Thomas Philippe's contribution to L'Arche's development, be it through his teachings, or through his personal involvement during the first stages of its evolution.

Mission

The task consists in highlighting and identifying the respective roles that Jean Vanier and Père Thomas played in establishing the fundamental values of L'Arche, in the progressive elaboration of its identity, and in the gradual awareness of its mission.

2. Together with Patrick and Eileen, we established a list of people to interview in accordance with the following principles:

General principle:

- To select people who had been close to the foundation, who had lived in L'Arche between the years 1964 and 1975. We limited the period of the foundation to the year 1975, which was the year that Jean Vanier started to prepare for his succession as leader of L'Arche International.

Based on this general principle, we looked for the widest possible representation of witnesses:

- People who had held positions of responsibility in communities, regions, internationally, or in founding L'Arche communities abroad.
- People with experience at the ground level, who had lived in Trosly, Cuise, Pierrefonds and Compiègne.
- People with disabilities: we selected 3 people with disabilities who had dictated a book on L'Arche.
- People who were closer to Père Thomas, and others, closer to Jean Vanier.
- Priests, including priests who had written about L'Arche spirituality, even if they had come to L'Arche after 1975.

- We decided to restrict the number of people questioned to about 40 because of time limitations, but also due to the scope of work requested.
- The majority of these people currently live in France, but for those who live in Canada or the US we held skype interviews (two with interpretation).

- Four people, who had not been included on our list, spontaneously sent us their written testimonies.
- The end result led to an approximate gender parity with 23 men and 19 women.

The limits we set for our work:

- We only questioned people who still have ties with L'Arche.

3. We then worked on the questions and selected three:

- What impressed you personally about Jean Vanier and Père Thomas?
- In your opinion, what were the respective roles of Jean Vanier and Père Thomas in the foundation of L'Arche? Whether at the spiritual, community or professional (medical, societal, work with families of people with disabilities) level?
- What did you witness during the early years of L'Arche that could shed light on the respective roles of Jean Vanier and Père Thomas?

4. Prior to beginning this process in December 2015 we chose to meet with:

- Jean Vanier, to inform him of our methodology and to give him the list of people we were going to contact;
 - Antoine Mourges, in relation to the historical research he carried out for his thesis: "Des sages et des savants aux tout petits. Aux origines des communautés de L'Arche, 1945-1965" ("From the wise and the learned to the vulnerable": The origins of L'Arche communities, 1945-1965")

5. The interviews were carried out from January to October 2016. Most of these interviews took place in Trosly or Paris, with the exception of 6 interviews via Skype for people who could not travel (from Canada, the United States or from remote areas in France). We deliberately chose not to record the interviews, however, a written report was drawn up after each one. We took long excerpts from these reports, which we compiled into a 70-page document classified by themes that are illustrated in the different paragraphs of our report. These reports and this document are to be submitted to the two international leaders and are not intended for distribution.

The interviews were carried out in a trusting, friendly and relaxed atmosphere. People seemed to appreciate having the opportunity to speak on the subject. Some even went so far as to thank us for doing this work on behalf of L'Arche. Furthermore, we were struck by the relative consensus that emerged from these interviews.

Throughout this listening process, we also examined books, texts and documents, and took excerpts from those that could shed light on the foundation of L'Arche. These excerpts have been compiled into a 109-page document that is also available for consultation.

List of documents:

- A letter by Jean Vanier dated August 22, 1964 (2 pages), Jean Vanier *Our life together, a biography in the form of letters*. Bellarmin (French edition), 2009.
 - Antoine Mourges - *Origins of L'Arche 1945-1965*. 477 pages, excerpt of 23 pages, unpublished manuscript, M.A. in Religious History, Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier, 2009.
- Anne-Sophie Constant. *Jean Vanier, portrait of a free man*. 243 pages, excerpt of 14 pages, Albin Michel, 2014.

- Père Bill Clarke. *Enough room for Joy*. 153 pages, excerpt of 7 pages, Bellarmin (French edition), 1985.
- Père Christian Mahéas. Thesis - *The role of the poor at the heart of the Church: The experience of L'Arche and the Pascal Mystery*. 128 pages, excerpt of 6 pages, Thesis of Master in Theology, Regis Collège, Toronto, Canada, 2003.
- Père Christian Salenson. Report from *Session 2008: Body and Community*. 21 pages, excerpt of 2 pages.
- Père Christian Salenson. *Remarkable Vulnerability: L'Arche, tested by disability*. 187 pages, excerpt of 6 pages, Nouvelle Cité, 2015.
- Kathryn Spink. *The Miracle, the Message, the Story*. 303 pages, excerpt of 14 pages, Novalis (French edition), 2007.
- Père Thomas Philippe. *Village of the Poor*. 20 pages, excerpt of 4 pages, brochure edited by La Ferme.
- Xavier le Pichon. Report on, *The role of Père Thomas in the foundation of L'Arche*. 29 pages in full.

- 6. In May 2016, Patrick and Eileen consulted us on the composition of the discernment commission** whose role would be to assist us in writing our final report. Père Franck Janin SJ, Antoine Mourges and Hilary Wilson were asked to be members of this commission. It met on the 3rd and 4th December 2016 to work on and amend the initial draft drawn up by Dominique Le Cardinal and Hubert Allier.
- 7. In January 2017, we met with Jean Vanier and presented him with the final report.**
- 8. The resulting final report was presented to the L'Arche International Leadership Team meeting on February 10th, 2017, in The Hague.**

Report on the respective roles of Jean Vanier and Père Thomas

Advisory note from the commission:

All of the positive aspects of Père Thomas' spiritual influence and his contribution to the community were acknowledged by the vast majority of people who contributed to this report. In recalling them here, there is no intention to minimize the gravity of the acts that Père Thomas is accused of, which were the subject of a canonical enquiry in 2015. The aim of this report is to carry out a more in-depth study of the respective roles of Jean Vanier and Père Thomas in the foundation of L'Arche.

1. The "Pre-history"

In order to better understand the foundation of L'Arche, we decided to carefully re-examine the events that preceded the foundation:

In the years 1943 – 1950, prior to meeting Père Thomas, Jean Vanier lived many experiences that had a profound impact on him. In the Royal Navy, he acquired organizational and leadership skills. He accompanied his mother in welcoming survivors from Auschwitz returning to Paris. He was also introduced to "Saint Benedict Labre House" for the homeless in Canada, founded by Tony Walsh. These two experiences sensitized him to the distress of outcasts.

During his service in the Royal Navy, Jean also discovered 'Friendship House', a live-in community with both black and white members, founded by Catherine Doherty and located in the heart of Harlem, New York. He was also struck by the Catholic Workers Movement and their Houses of Hospitality, founded by Dorothy Day, where Christians lived in community alongside low-income workers in New York's poor neighbourhoods. These two communities opened Jean up to the idea of "living with" as a response to exclusion.

L'Eau-Vive

In 1950 Jean Vanier met Père Thomas at L'Eau Vive, an international spiritual and Christian cultural centre founded by the latter in 1946 at Soisy-sur-Seine, Paris. It welcomed students who wanted to study philosophy and theology, without intending to become priests. They could attend classes at the 'Saulchoir', the Dominican Priory located close by. Jean Vanier went there for a year of discernment. The encounter between Jean Vanier and Père Thomas gave birth to a remarkable relationship, in which Jean Vanier became Père Thomas' spiritual son. A very close bond formed between the two men, which would determine their future lives.

*"Meeting Père Thomas marked my life. Through his words, his attitude, his quality of listening, and the peace that emanated from him, I saw that he was clearly a man of God. He awakened in me the desire to pray and dwell in the silence of God. He constantly referred to Jesus and Mary: it was as if he was living in their intimacy. He invited me to place my trust in them, to ask them for everything, to listen to them, to dwell in their presence. From the first time I met him, it was clear to me that our Père in Heaven had given him to me as a spiritual Père at that crucial moment in my life. He also became my teacher on an intellectual level."*¹

¹ Excerpt from a letter of Jean Vanier in 1994

In April 1952, Père Thomas was called to Rome. The reasons given for his summons were his state of health and internal tensions with the Dominican Province. He would never return to L'Eau Vive, and Rome would not give any further explanation about his departure. Even though the records of the process remain closed, thanks to university research conducted by historian Antoine Mourges,² we know today that the reason why Père Thomas left L'Eau Vive is because two women accused him of inappropriate behaviour during spiritual direction.

Jean Vanier, who was 24 years old at the time and unaware of the reasons for Père Thomas' departure, agreed to become the director of L'Eau Vive. In 1956, a canonical enquiry imposed heavy sanctions on Père Thomas, who was forbidden to exercise his ministry and administer sacraments. L'Eau Vive was closed.

For Père Thomas, this marked the beginning of a long period of exclusion that would last for eight years. During this period, Jean Vanier dedicated his time to the preparation of his doctorate in Philosophy. He lived a fairly solitary life, while continuing to search for his vocation. They lived these years of separation and incertitude as an ordeal, during which they both, separately, became aware of their own fragility. They rarely met during this time and corresponded by letters.

II. The Foundation

At the beginning of 1963, Père Thomas was authorized to leave Rome. He recovered the right to celebrate mass and administer the sacraments, but under the requirement of absolute discretion. Dr. Préaut (who had provided accommodation for Père Thomas during several of his stays at Longueil-Annel) proposed that he come to Trosly to be chaplain at the Val Fleuri. This seemed to be a solution that respected the requirement of absolute discretion. The Val Fleuri was a home for around thirty people with an intellectual disability. In 1964, Jean Vanier went to visit Père Thomas, who suggested to him that there must be "something to do" for people with disabilities. So, Jean Vanier chose to move to Trosly. He felt that this idea was the answer to the hopes and dreams he had harboured since leaving the Royal Navy. Père Thomas wrote about this decision a few years later: *"For my part, I did not ask Jean to come to Trosly. But when Jean decided of his own accord to care for the disabled and move into a very small house: L'Arche, I let him go ahead."*³

The birth of L'Arche was therefore the result of a strong relationship between two men who knew each other well and who had already journeyed together.

It was Père Thomas who introduced Jean Vanier to the world of disabilities. At this point it is worth mentioning what Jean Vanier later wrote in recalling his first impression of people with disabilities and the call that he felt:

"It was both an attraction and a repulsion. An attraction towards a mystery, and a repulsion in the face of abnormality. But above all else, what seduced me was their cry for friendship. They all turned toward me, like bees toward flowers. They touched me, asking me, 'Will you come back to see us?' I heard this silent cry. This enormous cry for relationship. It was something very gentle, of

² Unpublished manuscript of M.A. thesis in Religious History by Antoine Mourges (2009) "Origins of L'Arche 1945-1965" - University Paul Valéry Montpellier III

³ Letter of Father Thomas to Bishop Desmazières, dated March 11, 1977

an incredible gentleness. There was a certain violence between them, but in their relationships with me there was this call, this cry, for me to become their friend. This call touched me deeply. I was leaving for Canada to give my classes, but I knew that I would be returning. I did not know where nor how but I had the feeling that something was going to happen, and all that was needed was to let oneself be led.”⁴

Hence L’Arche was born out of this initial call from 'the poor', a call heard by both these men. Jean Vanier and Père Thomas were deeply convinced that they had been called together by Jesus to accomplish something for, and with, the poor. Jean later wrote that this profound unity between them was never shattered. It was the foundation of L’Arche.

III-The respective roles of Jean Vanier and Père Thomas

A passage from Jean Vanier’s book, “Community and Growth,” published in 1979, sheds light on his understanding of the different roles in the community:

“There is the role of the leader which is to help each person to find his place in community. There is the role of the spiritual guide, who is called to accompany people in the most intimate secret part of their consciousness. There is the role of medical professionals which is to help people heal. If these three roles are carried separately, and if those who carry them work together in harmony, each according to their speciality, people will grow towards greater inner freedom.”

However, the foundation of L’Arche cannot be explained solely by looking at the respective roles of Jean Vanier and Père Thomas, a full explanation must also include the relationships the first assistants had with them, and their commitment to the foundation.

Père Thomas

A priest of L’Arche at Trosly

Père Thomas wrote in 1973:-

“I am more and more convinced that, at least in Trosly, the principal and unique role of the priest, is to be, in so far as is possible, a humble and poor priest, a simple minister of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit, who is primarily concerned with the presence of God in each person. A priest at L’Arche needs to understand the heart of the poor and the treasure that is in their hearts ... The heart is all they have. If they do not discover the heart of Jesus in order to develop their own hearts, they will not find true joy”⁵

Père Thomas' area of activity was focused on the spiritual level and on administering the sacraments. His home was the chapel. He was a man of the Eucharist, of the word of God, particularly through his homilies and the ministry of reconciliation through the sacrament of penitence. His main focus was the community and the village of Trosly.

Accompanier.

Père Thomas supported and gave comfort to assistants as well as people with disabilities. Even if he was not present in the homes, he played a major role in the lives of people with disabilities.

⁴ Except from the book of Anne-Sophie Constant, *Jean Vanier, portrait of a free man*, Albin Michel, 2014

⁵ Except of a report on the role of the priest at L’Arche, written by Father Thomas in 1973.

There are abundant testimonies about the quality of his presence, his listening skills, his respect for people and his ability to read people's hearts. He also had quite an extraordinary gift when confronted with violence or great anxiety, particularly with people with disabilities. He saw people with disabilities as adults in faith. He believed in the presence of Jesus in their lives. A person with a disability gave witness to this, *"When I felt myself becoming violent, Père Thomas would hear my confession and that would calm me down."*⁶ Through his ministry of accompaniment, he also helped many people discover their vocation.

Outside of the structures.

Père Thomas' loyalty to the conception he had of his ministry meant that he did not want to participate on the decision-making level of L'Arche, he wanted to concentrate on offering support and spiritual accompaniment. *"When Jean came to establish L'Arche in Trosly, I was chaplain of the Val Fleuri, and wanted to remain completely outside of the official organizational side. I never wanted to be part of the Local Board. That was why Jean asked Père André d'Ourscamp to be on the Board."*⁷ As regards attending the Community Council in L'Arche Trosly, Père Thomas only attended when he thought that he could advocate for people in difficulty. This attitude can be explained by the profound evolution in the way Père Thomas conceived the role of a priest. For him, the priority was to be present to the poor and vulnerable. At the same time, he was restricted by the need to remain discreet in exercising his functions, due to his condemnation by the religious authorities.

Teaching at La Ferme.

Père Thomas gave theology classes on spiritual and mystical theology. Some saw him as being a true master in these areas, but others found his approach too traditional. In form and content his approach, founded on certain theological concepts dating back to the beginning of the 20th century, appeared to have remained in that era.

On the other hand, he was pioneering a new vision of the spirituality of the poor and of their place in the Church. This vision profoundly marked the foundation of L'Arche: welcoming wounded people into the heart of a fraternal and spiritual life, the gift of the poor, Jesus hidden in the poor, being servants and not masters, gentleness, poverty, humility, becoming again like "little ones." Père Christian Maheas explains this innovative aspect in his thesis⁸:

"Through the sacraments, the Church is open to the poor and "little ones" and it allows the poorest, those most rejected, to have fullness of grace, by assuming in a sense their poverty, indeed by loving it. There are poor (...) who will remain as "little ones" all of their lives, whose consciousness of the spirit will barely be able to develop, and yet they can have access to an extraordinary plenitude of grace. They will always stay on a level close to contemplative life, where sacrifice will play a very important role."

It must be noted, however, that the impact of Père Thomas' personality and teachings was almost exclusively limited to people who lived in, or passed through Trosly, with the exception of some people in Poland where he frequently gave retreats.

⁶ René Leroy

⁷ Letter to Bishop Desmazières, dated March 11, 1977.

⁸ *The role of the poor at the heart of the Church: The Experience of L'Arche and the Pascal Mystery.* Christian Mahéas. Master in Theology thesis, Toronto, Canada. (2003); page 101

Concern for the most vulnerable village residents

in Trosly: Père Thomas took them the sacraments. He also paid regular visits to patients at Clermont's psychiatric hospital.

Jean Vanier

Charismatic personality and visionary.

Jean Vanier gave impulse to and established the model of small homes based on "living with" people with a disability. It is surprising to note that in his circular letter, dated August 22nd, 1964, Jean Vanier already had a very clear idea about the future of the L'Arche project which he had created just a few days earlier:

*"On the edge of the forest of Compiègne, L'Arche has opened its first home for the mentally and physically handicapped. These family-like homes, each welcoming from four to nine boys, at least twenty years old, are lifelong homes. They are the first of a group of homes which will be linked together with workshops, a cultural centre, a chapel and the necessary medical help."*⁹

The choice of small homes was consistent with the contemporary French movement of "anti-traditional psychiatry", which was looking for ways to develop smaller structures. This "living with" characterized the particularity of L'Arche: at the heart of the educative relationships was friendship, spiritual life and giving responsibility to people with disabilities. Jean Vanier's vision gradually evolved, starting out from a concern about what society could do for people with disabilities, he then moved to the discovery of what people with disabilities could bring to society, to the Church and to each individual. Under this dynamic, he took part with Marie-Hélène Mathieu in the foundation of Faith and Light. Some years later, during a meeting in Rome, a bishop said to Jean Vanier, *"L'Arche has provoked a Copernican revolution. Up until now, we have spoken about doing good to the poor. But at L'Arche, you say that it is the poor who do us good. It will take a long time before this idea is integrated into the Church."*¹⁰

Director.

It was undeniably Jean Vanier who carried the vision of L'Arche. It was he who set the goals, and then took decisions on how to carry them out. His leadership was founded on the strength of his charisma and his gift of persuasion. Nevertheless, some people found that he wore too many hats at once (director, administrator, spiritual teacher, accompanier, animator, public relations, conference speaker, writer...) and that his personality was so strong, and carried such weight, that it was sometimes difficult to oppose it.

And yet, from the very beginning, Jean Vanier was keen to put in place a participative form of governance based on listening, trust and pragmatism. He organized meetings, inviting everyone to a series of exchanges, so that orientations could emerge. That was his method. His style of governance was to set up administrative, legal and financial structures that placed priority on people, not the structures themselves. Jean wanted authority to be as close as possible to ground level, it was his way of putting the emphasis on the personal growth of each person, rather than on that of the institution.

Jean Vanier knew how to manage people in relationships of trust. He attracted talent and allowed it to flourish. He had audacity. Many people spoke of how they were surprised by the confidence

⁹ Letter by Jean Vanier dated August 22, 1964.

¹⁰ Thesis Christian Maheas, op.cit. page 112- Cardinal Rylko, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

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Jean had in them and the responsibilities that he entrusted to them despite their youth and lack of experience. This trust proved to be particularly fruitful and remains one of the characteristics of L'Arche.

Jean Vanier is a man who builds more on practicalities and experience rather than pre-scheduled plans. He has proven to be very energetic. He has an inquisitive nature and is open to encounters and events. It can be noted that his natural authority is associated with a playful spirit, a taste for fun, a sense of celebration and festivity.

From 1975 onwards, Jean started preparing for his succession by stepping down from his role as International Leader. This move left room for others to establish organizational and coordination structures where he would no longer be the principal person in charge, although as founder he still continued to exercise a certain influence. This progressive withdrawal, scarcely ten years after the foundation, was an exceptional act for a founder. It can be noted that this created tension between Jean Vanier and Père Thomas who did not want him to step down from these responsibilities.

A man with an outward-looking approach.

Jean Vanier opened L'Arche up to the outside world. Many L'Arche communities were founded throughout the world, even in those early years. Jean travelled extensively to visit these communities, which provided him with the opportunity to learn about other cultures and ways of thinking (India, Africa and Poland). When he returned from these trips, he would share about what he had learned from these new contacts. This soon helped broaden the horizons of L'Arche through the discovery of different cultures and religions (in India, Africa and the Americas). In so doing, he revitalized what was sometimes a rather arduous daily life in the Trosly community.

Jean embraced the public side of his role. His concern for relationships with the state authorities led him to establish links with the local Prefect, who represents the French Government, and he attended meetings in the department and with associations. He was also close to the bishop and other church authorities. He embodied the three dimensions that were seen at that time as defining the fundamental aspects of L'Arche: professional, spiritual, community. However, aware as he was of his limits, his lack of professional training, and the needs of L'Arche, he sought support from outside of L'Arche. On the professional level, he called on psychiatrists in particular: Dr. Léone Richet, and later Dr. Erol Franko, who played an important part in the foundation of L'Arche.

He put in place a wide range of formations/training sessions for assistants, including the Renewal programmes that he started in England with the help of his sister, Thérèse Vanier. It is worth underlining the fact that external speakers were invited to these sessions, and that for the first Covenant retreat Jean Vanier chose Père Marie-Dominique to give the retreat, not Père Thomas.

A man with a gift for public speaking.

In 1964, when he took up his position at the university in Toronto, Jean Vanier discovered that he was a fine orator. His first talks in 1965 in Toronto was so successful that it led him to being invited to speak in other universities. His teachings were very spiritual but were also based on his first-hand experience of L'Arche. They spoke about human beings and how to live out the Gospels in daily life. It was not so much the content of his words that inspired, but rather the fact that they embodied what he was actually living. His talks were also nourished by the renewal message in the principal teachings of Vatican II, but also through other influences such as the spirituality of

Trappist monks (via his brother Benedict), the teachings of Saint Ignatius (via his Jesuit friends), and the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld (via his links with the Little Sisters of Jesus). His discovery of India and the figure of Gandhi also had an important impact on him. Notably absent from Jean's talks and writings was any quote from Père Thomas' writings. Jean Vanier, while acknowledging that he had been intellectually and spiritually formed by Père Thomas, had another thought structure and another way of announcing the Word.

IV- Diverging points of view between Jean Vanier and Père Thomas

Jean's loyalty to Père Thomas did not prevent him from taking a very independent stance on many issues. From the moment L'Arche began, Jean would do things, make decisions and give orientations that Père Thomas would disagree with.

The religious identity of the community.

It was very clearly Jean Vanier's intuition to develop L'Arche at the international level, in response to a call from foreign assistants wanting to begin L'Arche in their own countries. Père Thomas wanted L'Arche to be a religious community with an official canonical status granted by Rome, yet remaining open to welcoming other denominations or religions. However, L'Arche was very soon founded in countries where Catholicism was a minority religion (Canada, India and then the U.K), which led Jean Vanier to welcome members from other traditions and faiths. Communities would identify themselves as ecumenical or inter-religious out of respect for the religious identity of their members. This openness enabled L'Arche to discover the gift of people with disabilities to call people to unity. Père Thomas was never at ease with this divergence. It was the first time that Jean Vanier so strongly disagreed with him. When the first "International Charter of L'Arche" was adopted in 1973 this orientation ensured that no direct reference was made to Jesus. The following wording was used: "L'Arche communities are inspired by the Beatitudes and the spirit of the Gospels." This made room for religious diversity in L'Arche.

This was certainly the moment when the relationship between the two men was under the most strain. It can also be noted that the role and influence of Père Thomas in L'Arche International began to carry far less weight the further the distance from the community in Trosly.

A lay person, preaching retreats

Nor was it easy for Père Thomas to accept that Jean Vanier, who was not a priest, could preach retreats to lay people and religious, and offer spiritual accompaniment. Even if Père Thomas acknowledged the "fruits" of these actions, Jean did not feel supported nor understood by him in this.

Involvement in the social welfare and medical care systems.

L'Arche clearly positioned itself as a body funded by public authorities to whom it is accountable, this was the case when the first home was opened, and became even more so with the Val Fleuri. This public accountability worried Père Thomas and became a frequent source of tension between them.

The type of people welcomed by L'Arche.

Aware that it was not possible to welcome all those living on the margins of society, L'Arche decided to mainly dedicate itself to welcoming people with intellectual disabilities. This was because people with developmental disabilities require a specific type of support. Père Thomas,

by contrast, welcomed people with very eclectic needs and backgrounds. He wanted L'Arche to welcome all the poor, "*People suffering from mental illness, retarded people with personality disorders, the neurologically impaired, the elderly, the homeless, vagabonds, gypsies, all the unfortunate people living on the margins of society.*"¹¹ He attracted deeply vulnerable people. His project was to make a "village of the poor." Jean and L'Arche did not follow his lead. Jean Vanier, for his part, wanted L'Arche to welcome one type of person – those with intellectual disabilities - for their own good, and for the good of those that shared their lives. Limiting the scope of L'Arche in this way, helped to consolidate its foundation.

Mixing men and women. Père Thomas was not in favour of this in the lives of people with disabilities in the community. However, things evolved by necessity due to the fatigue caused by living at a distance from the work place. Women were gradually welcomed, and in September, 1974, the first home in Trosly for women, La Petite Source was opened. Then in 1975, l'Isba was founded in Compiègne, which was the first L'Arche home for both men and women with disabilities.

La Ferme.

This was born both out of Jean Vanier and Père Thomas' diverging visions, and the latter's desire to exercise his ministry to the poor who, though remaining close to L'Arche, were unable to find their place in a L'Arche home. An association "Les chemins de L'Arche" ("Paths of L'Arche") was set up to manage La Ferme. Père Thomas would have liked la Ferme to become an institution of the Church, with an official status granted by the bishop. To some extent, la Ferme became his own community. It can be said that at Trosly there were two groups: those who went on Sunday evenings to Jean Vanier's Gospel sharings, and those who went to Père Thomas' Saturday morning talks and rosary meditations. A few went to both.

A different approach to the spiritual life of the poor

Père Thomas deepened and developed the idea of the "awareness of love," which is present in every human being, but even more so in people with disabilities. He discovered that vulnerable people are particularly open and sensitive to the grace of God. He contributed to the development of the theology of the poor. He would bring people personally to adoration and the sacraments.

For Jean Vanier, however, it was community life, the daily "living with" the poor and sharing meals together that opened people up to the presence of God in themselves and in others. Living with people with a disability leads us to step down from our pedestals to acknowledge the presence of God in our common humanity. To be a friend is to become vulnerable: it is to take off our masks and take down our walls. It is in this reality that we discover "God with us." Giving people an opportunity to live in community with those who are wounded is the surest way to help anyone discover Christ and the Good News he brings, it is much more effective than a long talk.

These divergences never undermined the relationship of trust between Jean Vanier and Père Thomas.

The spiritual son remained close to his spiritual father.

Tensions there were, but not division, and not open opposition either. Even though Père Thomas had taught Jean Vanier to follow his own personal conscience and the Holy Spirit, that did not prevent him from being surprised to see Jean develop L'Arche in his own way and not follow Père Thomas in every decision. Jean Vanier followed his own personal intuition, which would lead him to sometimes confront Père Thomas. At that time, Jean did not speak publicly about the tensions

¹¹ Père Thomas, "Village of the poor"

between the two men. However, the foundation of L'Arche cannot be fully understood if we ignore the extremely deep bond, or covenant, that stemmed from the "spiritual Père/spiritual son" relationship which Jean maintained with Père Thomas. This covenant was based on a deep mutual trust. They never doubted one another.

For Père Christian Salenson,¹² these divergences were "fruitful tensions," "creative tensions." Naming their respective roles and differences was a way of acknowledging the beneficial role of this fruitful tension. They were two men who did not share the same vision. Two men seeking truth. Neither revered the other. There was mutual respect and synergy between them.

V. Conclusion

L'Arche is founded on the friendship and unshakeable bond between Jean Vanier and Père Thomas.

The notion of "founder" has evolved over time to become gradually more clearly defined. The term "co-founder," which was used in the years following Père Thomas' death (i.e. the period during which the 1993 Charter was written) was later judged to be excessive. The term "the inspirer" has appeared recently. We have chosen to use it, even if it seems a rather limited description of Père Thomas' contribution, which was to lay the spiritual foundation of L'Arche. Jean Vanier is Père Thomas' spiritual son. Jean Vanier certainly created an innovative life's work, however he drew on some of Père Thomas' fundamental intuitions, in particular the place given to the poor. This was the basis on which Jean Vanier built his own vision and developed an original life's work, which was also inspired by the spirituality and work of the Little Sisters of Jesus. In fact from 1950 onward, after his experience at Catherine Doherty's Friendship House, he wished to live in community with the poor.

Père Thomas, an inspirer.

Père Thomas was both the founder and director of L'Eau Vive. However, with regard to the practical implementation of L'Arche, Père Thomas was neither its founder nor its director. He was a discreet inspirer, as the one who introduced Jean Vanier to the spirituality of the poor. He was very present at the foundation, and remained present until his departure, carrying out his role of priest in keeping with his conception, and in the community of Trosly alone. He did not participate in the concrete establishment of the community, first of all because that was not his charisma, and also because he did not want to be part of the decision-making bodies. He wanted to stay in his role of priest-accompanier, an advocate for the people.

We can say therefore that Père Thomas was the inspirer in the sense that his contribution was made through his homilies and spiritual and theological teaching, his intuition on the place of the poor in the Church and in society, and the accompaniment he offered.

Père Thomas wanted to create a "village of the poor" which would welcome all the poor. Unity would be created through prayer in the oratory and around the priest celebrating the sacraments, because the Church is open to all the poor. This idea did not correspond to how L'Arche developed. It was at La Ferme that he sought to fulfil his dream.

Jean Vanier, the founder.

Jean Vanier made a distinction between the project for L'Arche and Père Thomas' project by choosing to limit the people welcomed at L'Arche to those with intellectual disabilities and by

¹² Father Christian Salenson, *Remarkable Vulnerability: L'Arche, tested by disability*, Nouvelle Cité (2015)

setting up small shared homes. His intuition was to “live with”, to share life with the poor, who in turn transform others and lead them closer to God.

He organized the community and established lines of authority, participatory decision-making, administrative structures, and sought recognition from the legal, financial and ecclesial authorities.

In order to consolidate L'Arche's foundations, Jean Vanier knew he needed to seek help from competent professionals, and to trust and have confidence in many young people.

In his teachings, he developed a “spirituality based on the encounter”, which is particular to community life in L'Arche.

He developed L'Arche at the international level, including in non-Catholic spheres (Anglican, Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist).

The interviews that we conducted therefore reveal that the respective place and roles of Jean Vanier and Père Thomas were complementary and different during the foundation phase. L'Arche would never have existed if they had not both been there together: Père Thomas, close to the poor and the little ones, was Jean Vanier's spiritual inspirer. And Jean Vanier was the founder of L'Arche.

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