

TO UNDERSTAND AND TO HEAL

Origins and Analyses of the Abuses within the Family of Saint John

*Interdisciplinary Commission
of the Brothers of Saint John*

Summary

November 2023

INTRODUCTION

Why Present a Summary?

The report *To Understand and to Heal, Origins and Analyses of the Abuses within the Family of Saint John*¹ was the result of several years of work involving brothers, sisters of Saint John, and many external experts from various disciplines: history, theology, psychology, systemics. Its purpose was to shed light on the sexual abuses committed by members of the Family of Saint John and their connections to its founder, Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, a Dominican and himself the perpetrator of numerous sexual abuses.

To make this 800-page document more accessible, it seemed desirable to create a summary. This summary highlights the most important elements contained in the report. It is also an invitation to read the report or some of its sections, which may have sparked interest, questions for understanding, and a desire for deeper insight.

As it is only an overview, it cannot fully represent everything it discusses on its own. It naturally refers back to the report, where the facts, analyses, arguments, conclusions, etc., are presented and elaborated upon. The subjects briefly discussed here are explored in greater depth in the report.

A summary was also sought to be translated into English, to provide understanding to those who do not have access to the report exclusively written in French – notably English-speaking brothers, sisters, and oblates – of the serious issues that had emerged in the Family of Saint John.

Composition of the Summary:

The summary follows the structure of the report, which is composed of three sections:

- Section 1: Historical Study
- Section 2: Theological Study
- Section 3: Psychological and Systemic Study

It begins with the general introduction of the report, reproduced verbatim. This includes the report's objectives, its various parts, and how the work was conducted.

The first part is a synthetic exposition of the historical section of the report. It remains very close to the original text, particularly in terms of nuances and vocabulary. The decision was made to conclude it by reproducing verbatim the conclusion of the report's historical study, due to its relevance and the comprehensive vision it offers.

The second part is a summary of the report's doctrinal section, covering only a few points. It thus highlights certain more problematic doctrinal aspects of M.-D. Philippe, which may have led to a weakening of moral conscience and fostered sexual abuses.

The third part outlines the contents of the report's psychological and systemic study. This study aimed to answer two questions: how can we understand the behaviors of Fr. M.-D. Philippe? How did the abuses become systemic in the Family of Saint John?

The final section includes the general conclusion of the report, reproduced in full, as it synthesizes the conclusions of the three parts of the report.

¹ <https://freres-saint-jean.org/2023/06/26/sortie-du-rapport-comprendre-et-guerir/>

TABLE OF ACRONYMS

Acronyms by which we refer to the archival holdings to which we had full or partial access. These holdings are not accessible to the general public¹.

AAI:	Archives of L'Arche International*
ALA:	Archives of Lérins Abbey
ACASJ:	Archives of the Commission SOS Abuse of the Brothers of Saint John, Rimont.
ACDF:	Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, Rome*
ADA:	Archives of the Diocese of Autun
DAPF:	Dominican Archives of the Province of France, Paris*
GACSJ:	General Archives of the Congregation of the Brothers of Saint John, Rimont
GAOP:	General Archives of the Order of Preachers, Santa Sabina, Rome*
PAMD:	Personal Archives of Father M.-D. Philippe, Rimont*
PAJV:	Personal Archives of Jean Vanier, Trosly and Paris*
AAPS:	Archives of the Apostolic Sisters of Saint John, Semur-en-Brionnais
ACS:	Archives of the Contemplative Sisters of Saint John, Troussures
NFA:	Archives marked as 'Not for All'*

¹ For a precise description of the holdings marked with an * see N. JEAMMET, B. GRANGER, A. MOURGES, F. MICHEL, C. VINCENT-MORY, G. RIMBAUT, *Emprise et Abus, enquête sur Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier et L'Arche [Ascendancy and Abuse, Investigation on Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier and L'Arche]*, Châteauneuf-sur-Charente, Frémur, 2023, pp. 867–879.

TO UNDERSTAND AND TO HEAL

REPORT INTRODUCTION

Since the first revelations in 2013 about the sexual abuses¹ by their founder – Father Marie-Dominique Philippe – and thanks to the brave voices of the victims, the brothers and sisters of the Family of Saint John² have embarked on a profound review of their history, their formation, and their internal culture. The gradual discovery over the last ten years of a significant number of abuses committed by brothers further highlighted the need for this endeavor.

This necessity, as well as the subsequent report, can be understood on four levels:

- The need to account, through a detailed historical narrative, for what happened before and after the foundation of the Family of Saint John.
- The need for a diagnosis revealing the roots of the abuses, with insights from historical, theological, and psychological disciplines.
- The ongoing need to contribute to the work initiated by the brothers and sisters of Saint John, to eliminate what might have facilitated the observed abuses within their religious family and to reform what needs to be reformed.
- The ultimate and paramount need to address the demands of the victims, who rightfully demand that such abuses never recur. This necessitates the acknowledgment of these abuses and the processes that led to them.

1. Origin of the Commission

In 2019, the first report from the Commission SOS Abuse, released during the spring session of the General Chapter of the brothers, revealed the structural nature of the abuses within their institute, connected to Father M.-D. Philippe.

In the months that followed this session, several brothers examined numerous documents from Dominican archives, those from the province of France and those from the general curia of the Order in Rome, which had been closed until then. On the basis of these documents, during the autumn

¹ 'The concept of sexual abuse is based on the idea that the asymmetry of the relationship and the exploitation of vulnerability by one person against another inherently hinders the expression of free and informed consent; it can be applied to any relationship where a person – even if adult – being under the factual or legal authority of another, undergoes sexual violence. It also allows for understanding acts of a sexual nature committed without violence, constraint, threat, or surprise.' *Rapport de la CIASE [CIASE Report]*, October 2021, 536 p., p. 83, paragraph 0133.

² The Family of Saint John comprises 3 independent religious institutes:

- The Brothers of Saint John (422), founded in 1975.
- The Contemplative Sisters of Saint John (53), founded in 1982.
- The Apostolic Sisters of Saint John (175), founded in 1984.

The Family of Saint John also includes secular oblates (about 800).

Only the 3 religious institutes are covered in this report.

session of this General Chapter, the involvement of Father Marie-Dominique in the Eau Vive¹ case was presented. His condemnation by Rome in 1957 was then revealed for the first time. It thus became somewhat clear that the numerous cases of sexual abuse committed by the brothers likely had deep-seated origins in the personal and family history of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe. In order to obtain as thorough a clarification as possible, the 2019 General Chapter requested the Prior General to:

[...] set up an Interdisciplinary Commission to specifically determine the link between the revelations of the Eau Vive case and the sexual abuses committed by the founder of the Family of Saint John and by some of its members².

2. The Purpose of This Work

In its concluding message, the same General Chapter of the Brothers of Saint John in 2019 specified:

This historical, theological, and psychological work, which should involve experts, appears to be a necessary condition to end a deviation lasting at least 70 years. This deviation, besides causing unspeakable pain and major scandals, also led to a dimming of the faith in many victims, betrayed by representatives of Christ³.

The decisions of the 2019 General Chapter of the Brothers echoed similar stances taken by the apostolic sisters during their General Chapter in November 2021 and by the contemplative sisters during their General Chapter in February 2022.

As will be shown later on, from its inception, the Family of Saint John was tainted by a sort of 'virus', which had been malevolent for at least several decades prior and whose most serious effect is the spread of sexual abuse accompanied by justifications. The purpose of this report is to contribute to the work already carried out over the past decade towards healing and preventing this evil⁴, aligning with what Dom Dysmas de Lassus writes in his book *En Sortir [Making it Through]*:

Clearly, it is essential to trace back to the root causes and address the problems at their origin [...] doing so will give hope to those ready to bear the painful repercussions of the events, as long as everything is restored not as before, but in righteousness and truth⁵.

Thus, this historical, doctrinal, and psychological work was written primarily for the brothers and sisters of the Family of Saint John as a service to support their journey, their 'exodus', towards a land free from all bondage and abuse.

We believe that such a study can also benefit the lay oblates of the Family of Saint John, those connected to it, and more generally, all those hurt or scandalized by the abuses themselves or their disclosure.

The following pages can be read in conjunction with the reports commissioned by the Dominicans of the province of France⁶ and L'Arche International⁷. The three reports often address the same realities, albeit from different perspectives.

¹ Eau Vive refers to a formation center founded in 1946 by Father Thomas Philippe. He was severely condemned by the Church in 1956 due to numerous sexual abuses accompanied by justifications. This case, in which Fr. Marie-Dominique Philippe was involved, is covered in Chapter 2: the Eau Vive Case (1952–1959).

² Final message from the second session of the 2019 General Chapter of the Brothers of Saint John, GACSJ

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ An overview of this work among the brothers is provided in Chapter 26, III: 'Review of the main initiatives taken by the brothers to address the situation of abuse and pave new pathways to life.'

⁵ *Risques et dérives de la vie religieuse, Volume 2 – En sortir [Risks and Excesses of Religious Life, Volume 2 - Making it Through]*, Version 0.6b (February 2021), p. 8. (<http://risques2.org> ; accessed on April 4, 2023).

⁶ T. CAVALIN, *L'affaire, les dominicains face au scandale des frères Philippe [The case. The Dominicans Up Against the Scandal of the Philippe Brothers]*, Paris, Cerf, February 2023.

⁷ N. Jeammet, B. Granger, A. Mourges, F. Michel, C. Vincent-Mory, G. Rimbaut, *Emprise et Abus, enquête sur Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier et L'Arche [Ascendancy and Abuse, Investigation on Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier and L'Arche]*, Châteauneuf-sur-Charente, Frémur, 2023.

3. The Context of This Work

The revelation of the abuses committed by their founder triggered a fundamental upheaval for the brothers and sisters. How could Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, whom they loved and from whom they had received most of their intellectual and religious formation, have carried within him such a dark and destructive side? To this trauma was added the shock of the gradual discovery of numerous cases of sexual abuse committed by the brothers (and, to a much lesser extent, by the sisters). How is it possible that this or that brother, often a role model, a senior, a trainer, a prior, a zealous apostle, could have behaved in such a way, causing such profound harm to individuals?

Beyond the particularly heinous cases of sexual abuse committed against minors, the high number of sexual abuses, coupled with justifications, towards adults revealed a severe specific issue¹. From the first internal realizations, a reform process was initiated. It is supported by the Church authorities and is still ongoing.

While it's true that severe sexual and spiritual abuses, causing irremediable injuries, were committed by members of the Family of Saint John from its inception, it is also true that the vast majority of the brothers and sisters lived out their religious consecration honestly. They were stunned to discover both the extent and severity of the issue and of the community dysfunctions they had been unaware of.

Amidst the shame felt and impoverishment, leading to introspection and radical reforms, the Family of Saint John has been encouraged in this endeavor by numerous families, monks, nuns, priests, and bishops, even up to the Roman authorities. They voiced their astonishment, but also observed that the weeds have not choked out the wheat². The story of the Brothers of Saint John is not solely about sexual abuse³. However, today, in order to prevent such transgressions from recurring, it was necessary to try to recount the painful narrative of events and to study their origins.

By commissioning this report through their General Chapter, the Brothers of Saint John have chosen to truthfully face the darkest part of their history to build their future on righteous and evangelical foundations. Embracing the certainty that their institute has a charism given by Jesus Christ⁴, they are convinced that, provided there's a genuine path to conversion, despite the prevalence of serious disorders, Christ's grace can prevail⁵.

In this same spirit, brothers, sisters, and external experts have collaborated since 2019 to draft this report. Their work confronted them with a complex human and community reality, where good and evil, truth and lies, darkness and light coexisted and even constantly intertwined. It was an arduous task because the facts, regardless of the severity of actions taken and their distance in time, are always odious and revolting, especially because the suffering of the victims is deeply unsettling, even

¹ 73% of the abuse cases committed by the brothers involve adults, and 27% involve individuals under 18. See in the general appendices: 'Statistiques sur les abus sexuels commis par des frères de Saint-Jean' [Statistics on Sexual Abuses Committed by the Brothers of Saint John].

² On this point, we can cite an article by Jean Duchesne about brothers Philippe and Jean Vanier: 'insofar as, on one hand, no inconsistency or guilt was felt, and on the other hand, good was concurrently done and is not entirely in vain, one must acknowledge a paradoxical sincerity, or at least a service, certainly ambiguous and limited, but ultimately genuine, to the Truth. This might explain why L'Arche and the community of Saint John, compelled to unsparing revisions, remain resilient (as are the Legionaries of Christ).' *Quand il faut imaginer Tartuffe sincère [Imagining Sincere Hypocrisy]*, Aleteia, February 7, 2023. <https://fr.aleteia.org/2023/02/07/quand-il-faut-imaginer-tartuffe-sincere/>

³ The 2022 General Chapter of the Brothers requested an external historian be commissioned to write its history, in a broader context and not solely from the perspective of abuse, as is the case here.

⁴ 'The common foundation of your three institutes, your foundational charism, as you express in your texts and strive generously to live out, is a fertile spiritual heritage for each of you and for the Church. The shared patronage of Apostle Saint John and the Virgin Mary beautifully marks the following of Christ that you aim to live. The emphasis on personal prayer, fraternal and communal life, the commitment to proclaiming the Gospel, and the importance given to study in the pursuit of truth, are demands that positively resonate with the conditions of faith today' (Letter to the Family of Saint John from Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, June 22, 2016, GACSI).

⁵ Cf. Rm 5, 20.

after years of listening and reading terrible accounts. With the constant images of these wounded individuals in mind on one hand, and thinking of future generations on the other, the authors of this report sought to understand how such a disaster could occur.

This effort to understand required studying what transpired from the various perspectives of three main disciplines: history, theology, and psychology, trying to distinguish what is certain, probable, and hypothetical.

4. Historical Study

From a historical standpoint, it was first necessary to trace the deviations of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe before the foundation of the community of Saint John in 1975. This is the subject of the first section of the historical aspect. The 'Eau Vive' case is notably recounted there, focusing primarily on Father Marie-Dominique Philippe.

The second segment of the historical overview addresses the sexual abuses within the Family of Saint John since its inception. Constructing this narrative proved to be highly intricate and delicate. The mentioned instances of abuse indeed date back to a relatively recent period. Almost all the individuals involved are still alive. The victims were deeply affected in their spiritual, psychological, and physical well-being and emerged profoundly wounded. Civil and ecclesiastical legal proceedings are still ongoing. For all these reasons, it was necessary to approach the topic striving to articulate matters transparently while maintaining the utmost discretion, to avoid inflicting further pain. We hope to have met this goal of balancing historical investigation with the respect for individuals as best as possible.

While this historical work details what happened within the Family of Saint John to understand the causes and roots, it is by no means a judicial inquiry or a trial, aiming to assess personal responsibilities and guilt. It was neither within our expertise nor our goal of understanding a severe community issue, aiming for reconstruction, to disclose the names of those who committed sexual abuse¹, even if they are already known to the members of the Family of Saint John or the general public².

5. Doctrinal Study

A doctrinal study was imperative because the sexual abuses, which primarily took place within a spiritual guidance relationship, were rationalized using spiritual, theological, and philosophical references. These justifications were more or less directly connected with the formation imparted by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, which he had already been espousing since the 1950s at the latest. These false explanations, given by those in spiritual authority, distorted the moral conscience of the victims, leading them to perceive a good where there was only a grievous wrongdoing with severe implications. It was, therefore, necessary to closely examine the various justifications used in different forms of abuse and analyze their possible ties to teachings from Father M.-D. Philippe.

This work, which constitutes the second major section of this report, required a threefold understanding. Firstly, it was essential to know the justifications used, as mentioned in many victims' accounts or from those who committed the abuses or in letters from that era. Secondly, one needed to have a comprehensive and thorough grasp of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe's mystical, theological, and philosophical teachings. Thirdly and finally, it was essential to refer to the Tradition of Catholic theology and the Church's magisterial teachings, especially in moral matters.

¹ Except for Marie-Dominique Philippe and Alix Parmentier, given their roles in the foundation of the Family of Saint John and in the propagation of abuses.

² Additionally, many names have been made public by the media, and the religious brothers and sisters of the Family of Saint John are directly informed by their superiors about ecclesiastical and civil convictions imposed on brothers who committed sexual abuse.

6. Psychological and Systemic Study

Understanding the sexual abuses within the Family of Saint John could not be restricted solely to historical and doctrinal studies. Additionally, the third segment of this report necessitated a psychological and systemic study¹. This research offers insights not only into mechanisms of control and abuse but also into the communal dysfunctions that facilitated such misconduct. The study focuses on the past, but also on the present and future of the Family of Saint John. Indeed, the experts responsible for this study aimed to contribute to the healing of the communal body. Their analysis reveals, even tracing back to their ancient origins, the deadly currents that have affected the Family of Saint John, but also the vital forces that reside within it and serve as resources for its healing.

7. External Experts

In order to obtain the necessary perspective and expertise for such historical, doctrinal, and psychological research, it was essential to consult experts outside of the community of Saint John. They contributed their analyses and diverse perspectives through discussions, working meetings, sharing of texts (archival documents, work notes, etc.), writing chapters of the report, and then providing annotated reviews of it. In total, we have engaged in dozens of hours of discussions and hundreds of hours of writing and reviewing, from 2020 to 2023.

The historical aspect of the work benefited from the expertise of Mr. Florian Michel and Mr. Antoine Mourges, both involved in the commission appointed by L'Arche International².

For the doctrinal study, Sister Geneviève Médevielle, s.a., a theologian, dedicated much of her time to analyzing justifications and reviewing the doctrinal section. Additionally, the brotherly collaboration of Dominican theologians Gilles Berceville, Thierry-Marie Hamonic, and Emmanuel Perrier was especially enlightening.

The psychological and systemic study was led by Dr. Dominique Struyf in close collaboration with Ms. Julie Saint Bris and Mr. Yves Dagrégario. Besides their recognized expertise, these three specialists were particularly suited for this task due to their years of therapeutic accompaniment of numerous victims and perpetrators of abuse within the Family of Saint John.

Furthermore, a review committee was established to guide the report writing process, with a special emphasis on ensuring accuracy and clarity of presentation and argumentation. The numerous reviews by members of this committee were invaluable. Its members are Sister Noëlle Hausman, s.c.m., (theologian), Mr. Paul Airiau (historian), and Dr. Chantal Van Cutsem (psychiatrist trained in systemic therapy).

The brothers of the Family of Saint John involved in this work are brothers Renaud-Marie Desplanques and Jean-Eudes Pasquet, mainly for the historical study³; brothers Alain-Marie de Lassus and Martin Sabathé for the doctrinal study, and Brother Gabriel Hibon for the psychological aspect.

Sister Claire-Théophane Cesbron of the apostolic sisters of Saint John and Sister Johanna Vorstman of the contemplative sisters of Saint John were mandated by their respective Prior Generalesses to be associated with the work of the commission.

¹ Systemics analyze the entirety of the system an individual belongs to, as well as the interactions and relationships within that system. It delves into the health and illness of groups and has given rise to family therapies and institutional therapies.

² Cf. N. JEAMMET, B. GRANGER, A. MOURGES, F. MICHEL, C. VINCENT-MORY, G. RIMBAUT, *Emprise et Abus, enquête sur Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier et L'Arche [Ascendancy and Abuse, Investigation on Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier and L'Arche]*, Châteauneuf-sur-Charente, Frémur, 2023.

We also had fruitful discussions with historian Tangi Cavalin, who heads the historical commission of the Dominicans of the province of France. Cf. *L'affaire. les dominicains face au scandale des frères Philippe [The case. The Dominicans Up Against the Scandal of the Philippe Brothers]*, op.cit..

³ Br. Renaud-Marie Desplanques was also in charge of organizing the work of the commission.

It goes without saying that only the authors of the report, whose names are specified in the following paragraph, are responsible for its content.

8. The Editorial Work

Beyond the collaborative work of research and upstream analysis, the drafting of the report texts was also the result of numerous exchanges between most of the previously named individuals.

Seven external experts reviewed the first part of the historical section, written by Brother Renaud-Marie Desplanques (chapters I, II, and IV) and Mr. Florian Michel (chapter III). The second part of the historical section, written by Brother Jean-Eudes Pasquet, was reviewed by six of the experts, three of whom had provided therapy to many members of the Family of Saint John, either victims or perpetrators of abuse.

The doctrinal part, penned by Brothers Alain-Marie de Lassus and Martin Sabathé, was reviewed by seven of the experts.

The chapters of the psychological and systemic aspect, six of which were written by Dr. Dominique Struyf, Julie Saint Bris, and Yves Dagrégorio and two others by Brother Gabriel Hibon, were reviewed by various individuals as well as by three other experts.

Thus, the commission worked in a combined manner, with research that united, on the one hand, experts bringing specific skills and external perspectives and, on the other hand, members of the Family of Saint John. They brought their own resources and knowledge as members of the community, having lived within it for many years of religious commitment.

The major superiors of the institutes of the brothers and the apostolic and contemplative sisters of Saint John were informed about the progress of the research and writing. They supported the work of the commission, without constraining it in any way.

9. The Sources and Their Use

The work of the Interdisciplinary Commission was based on a significant amount of information: both old and recent archival documents from various sources, listening to victims and perpetrators of abuse, interviews with brothers and sisters, investigations, study notes, reports from commissions of brothers and sisters, etc.

To protect the identity of the victims, the most confidential documents were shared among the commission members in an anonymized form. Furthermore, all individuals involved in the commission's work committed in writing to adhere to a confidentiality protocol.

It should be noted that the main authors of the report had direct and confidential discussions with victims or perpetrators of abuse within the context of the Family of Saint John; for most, this involved tens if not hundreds of hours of meetings.

The report contains numerous quotes from victims, but these only represent a small part of the confidential documents, including victim testimonials, upon which the commission based its research. The limited number of quotes is partly due to the desire to prevent victims from being identified and partly because quotes from victims obtained in a confidential setting required their prior consent, unless these statements were already public or lacked any personal and exclusive nature. We believe that the quotes included in the report will sufficiently aid in understanding the presented information.

Additionally, we ensured that the cited remarks, especially those of victims, were not unique but were echoed similarly in other testimonies and archival holdings. We thus discarded testimonies that did not seem sufficiently reliable to us or whose content wasn't found elsewhere.

10. Conclusion

Our various presentations complement the remarkable works of the commissions from L'Arche International and the Dominicans of the province of France. These two studies provide valuable additional insights to better understand the deviations observed in Father Marie-Dominique Philippe and the religious institutes he founded.

The commission does not claim to provide a comprehensive, definitive, and conclusive word on such a vast and complex subject. Aware that its report is surely improvable in many ways, the commission believes, nonetheless, that its work represents a significant step forward in understanding the tragedy of sexual abuse in the Family of Saint John and that it can aid in its healing.

The report's authors

HISTORICAL STUDY

FATHER M.-D. PHILIPPE AND THE EAU VIVE CASE (1952-1959)

I. THE EAU VIVE CASE (1952-1959)

In 1956-1957, four members of the Dehau-Philippe family were sanctioned by the Holy Office: Thomas Philippe, Cécile Philippe, Pierre Dehau, and Marie-Dominique Philippe. While each was found guilty on various counts, the Roman body observed a common belief among them: it is not impossible for a person committed to consecrated celibacy to engage in sexual practices.

A. Father Thomas and Eau Vive (1952-1959)

In 1942, Father Thomas Philippe was sent to conduct a canonical visitation at the Saulchoir, the Dominican study convent of the French Province, whose regent of studies, Father Chenu, had published a work placed on the Index by the Holy Office. The case involved a rivalry between different doctrinal factions within the Order. Eventually, Father Thomas became regent of studies in place of Father Chenu, who was removed. This role was challenging for the young Dominican, who had to deal with a divided faculty and bear the criticism of being 'the enforcer of Father Chenu'.

In 1945, he founded Eau Vive 500m from the Saulchoir, an 'international center for spiritual and doctrinal formation (...) eager to deeply engage with the three wisdoms of contemplation, theology, and philosophy, as proposed by the Church through Saint Thomas and his saints'¹. This was clearly in contrast to the ongoing theological innovations in the French Province, for which Father Chenu had been sanctioned. Relieved of his duties as regent of studies in 1948, Father Thomas devoted himself entirely to the Eau Vive project. The quality of the teachers, the reputation of some of them, the originality of the formula, fidelity to Thomistic tradition, and a solid network of relationships, led to Eau Vive quickly gaining significant influence (60-70 students in 1952, about 130 people including temporary visitors).

In 1952, a canonical investigation was launched following the testimony of two adult women reporting sexual practices by Father Thomas accompanied by mystical justifications. The investigation, which lasted several years, revealed at least thirty victims of Father Thomas, many of whom were nuns, including three religious community superiors. The sexual practices reported dated back to 1942; they took place in Dominican convents, Carmels, and at Eau Vive. They involved kissing, intimate

¹ Note written by Father Thomas Philippe and published in 1951, cited in *Rapport de Xavier Le Pichon sur la place du Père Thomas Philippe dans la fondation de L'Arche* [Xavier Le Pichon's Report on Father Thomas Philippe's role in the foundation of L'Arche], May 10, 2016, p. 10. <https://docplayer.fr/169960951-Rapport-de-xavier-le-pichon-sur-la-place-du-pere-thomas-philippe-dans-la-fondation-de-l-arche-sommaire.html>

caressing, fellatio, complete sexual union, practices with multiple women, etc. Furthermore, it was revealed that Thomas Philippe had an incestuous relationship with his sister Cécile and had arranged for the abortion, with the complicity of two other close women, of a child he had fathered with one of his victims.

Father Thomas Philippe's sexual practices were primarily based on 'mystical graces' he claimed to have received in Rome in 1938, which 'involved a divine influence over the body, distinctly localized in the region of the sexual organs and radiating from there, as from within, over the entire body and spirit'¹. These intimate experiences convinced him that the Virgin Mary had sexual relations with her son, which continue in Heaven and that it is given to certain individuals to relive this 'hidden mystery'. He then considered himself the keeper of an exceptional secret, based on which he rethought the mystery of Mary, the economy of revelation, and the mystery of the Church. To justify these practices, he believed that the Holy Spirit, being God and creator and thus beyond commandments, could prompt certain souls to do things that common morality condemns.

In 1956, the cardinals of the Holy Office condemned Father Thomas by forbidding him from celebrating the sacraments and any other exercise of priestly ministry; his superiors were asked to place him in a psychiatric clinic and ensure that he could not exert any influence on women, religious or otherwise, especially in the form of spiritual direction. However, he was not removed from the clerical state or expelled from the Dominicans. Simultaneously, disciplinary actions were taken against Father Dehau, Mother Cécile Philippe², Jean Vanier³, and Father Marie-Dominique Philippe. An investigation was also conducted into the relations of Héléne Claeys Bouùaert with Fathers Thomas and Marie-Dominique⁴. Eau Vive was dissolved in 1958.

Although he admitted to the acts he was accused of, Father Thomas showed no sincere repentance. For him, his actions were not sins and could not be judged externally; they were solely a matter of internal forum. Convinced that he is a 'tool of God' towards the women he abuses, believing his sexual practices are moments of prayer inspired by God, he unscrupulously lies, manipulates, and disobeys any authority that opposes him, as numerous archival documents attest. For years, despite being forbidden, Brother Thomas continued to communicate with his closest disciples, who formed the group known as the 'little ones'⁵. From a distance, he continued to lead this group and managed to meet them periodically by using numerous schemes.

B. Father Dehau's Influence

Father Pierre-Thomas Dehau, the maternal uncle of Thomas and Marie-Dominique and a spiritual icon of his time, played a role in the resurgence of mysticism and Thomistic thought. He had

¹ *Pro memoria* by Thomas Philippe, March 1, 1956 (doc. 44), Archive Report. Le cas du Rév. P. Thomas Philippe [The case of Rev. P. Thomas Philippe], O.P., Prot. n. 214/52, p. 3, ACDF.

² From 1955, the Holy Office was informed of serious incidents that had occurred at the Monastery of the Cross under the priorship of Mother Cécile Philippe (1942-1948). Nuns there engaged in sexual practices among themselves and with Father Thomas, individually or in groups. These acts were covered up by Mother Cécile, the prioress and mistress of novices. She directed the sisters to her brother and allowed them long nightly parlors with him. Mother Cécile herself had incestuous relations with Father Thomas and homosexual relations with the sisters. The Holy Office was also informed of similar behaviors in Bouvines where Mother Cécile was superior from 1945 – while remaining prioress of the Monastery of the Cross until 1948.

³ In 1950, Jean Vanier (1928-2019) joined Eau Vive; he quickly became the spiritual son of Father Thomas, his confidant, and devoted assistant. In 1956, he too was affected by the decisions of the Holy Office, where he was seen as a blind and fanatical disciple. As the director of Eau Vive since his mentor's departure in 1952, he was ordered by the cardinals of the dicastery to leave Eau Vive as soon as possible; he was forbidden from engaging in any activity related to Eau Vive or any of its potential foundations. He was also informed that he could not be ordained a priest until he had spent several years in a seminary.

⁴ Héléne Claeys Bouùaert (1888-1959) was a Belgian mystic accompanied by Father Dehau from 1900, then by Father Thomas, who played a confirmatory role in the foundation of Eau Vive. Regarding the investigation into her cf. *To Understand and to Heal*, pp. 55-56.

⁵ Cf. N. JEAMMET, B. GRANGER, A. MOURGES, F. MICHEL, C. VINCENT-MORY, G. RIMBAUT, *Emprise et Abus, enquête sur Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier et L'Arche [Ascendancy and Abuse, Investigation on Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier and L'Arche]*, Châteauneuf-sur-Charente, Frémur, 2023, p. 262-267.

a significant influence on the Catholic academic world of his era. Despite his near-blindness, he devoted himself to apostolate through preaching, especially in Carmels and Dominican monasteries. He held a major place in the Philippe family. The three Philippe children involved in the Eau Vive case had a privileged relationship with him; he bore responsibility for their serious misconduct.

Informed by Father Thomas Philippe of the 'mystical graces' received in Rome in 1938, Father Dehau, instead of helping him free himself from these absurd ideas, seemed to confirm them, saying: 'Oh! With the Holy Virgin, you know...'; he implied that he himself was not unaware of such matters and sought with him in the mystics indications regarding the role of sexuality in mystical life. Encouraged by Father Thomas to confide in their Uncle Dehau about their experiences with him, some victims returned 'enlightened' and still deeply attached to Father Thomas. The promoter of justice of the Holy Office, equivalent to a prosecutor, would later deem him the primary responsible for the tragedy at Eau Vive; however, his punishment was merely a warning due to his advanced age; he died six months later, in October 1956.

Shortly after his condemnation, he had confessed to the commissioner of the Holy Office 'that in the past, he had experienced "very mysterious things" with certain nuns, but [...] that his nephew, Father Thomas Philippe, had "perhaps lacked prudence" in imitating him!' This likely confirms the testimony of a nun to the Holy Office about Father Dehau's sexual practices with three convent superiors¹.

II. MARIE-DOMINIQUE PHILIPPE'S INVOLVEMENT

Deeply involved in defending his brother from the beginning of the case², Father Marie-Dominique eventually faced accusations himself. Since the initial allegations against Father Thomas, the Holy Office has gathered numerous troubling reports about Father Marie-Dominique: testimonies and letters relating to his spiritual guidance³, his response to his brother's sexual abuses, his moral conduct, correspondence from the provincial of the Province of France, information from superiors disturbed by his teachings on spiritual and religious life, or by the confusion and division he sowed in their community⁴...

But, although he maintains a close relationship with his brother's followers, the core of the 'little ones', and plays a significant role among them, Father Marie-Dominique does not replace his brother who continues to manage things from afar; he is not part of the 'little ones'. While orbiting the periphery of the group, he does not share all their secrets and thus is not a true part of this core, which takes on all the traits of a mystical sect. This does not prevent him from playing a disturbing role and supporting his brother's actions.

¹ Cf. *To Understand and to Heal*, pp. 48-50.

² Father Marie-Dominique, although aware of the background to the case, used the bitterness and resentment related to the replacement of Father Chenu by Father Thomas in 1942, and the tensions and rivalries between Le Saulchoir and L'Eau vive, to develop and spread the false - but effective - idea that the L'Eau vive case was a revenge against Father Thomas and a plot to regain control of the formation center. Despite its lack of foundation, the idea that his brother had been the victim of vindictiveness on the part of his Dominican brothers would live on, even years later. She would be propagated in L'Arche (by Father Thomas himself) and in the Saint-Jean community. Cf. *To Understand and to Heal*, p. 41-44.

³ Madeleine Guérault, a victim of Father Thomas and spiritually guided by Father Marie-Dominique, testified to the Holy Office: '[Father Marie-Dominique] confirmed that the kiss on the lips was permissible. I had said: 'When Father Thomas tried, I pushed him away. Should I have let it happen, is it a grave sin?' 'No, it's allowed between fiancés.' But I myself am not engaged to Father Thomas! So if these things aren't from God, they're illicit, we need to figure this out once and for all! But Father M[arie-]Do[minique] thought about the Song of Songs, and that it could still be from God. He [M.-D. Philippe] consented to Father Thomas seeing me undressed [...]' (*Testimony of Madeleine Guérault* T, p. 4-6, III O 59 Eau Vive 2, "L'Affaire" ["The Case"], DAPF); '[Father Marie-Dominique] told me: 'if it were any other priest, I'd find it disgusting, and I'd have you leave Eau Vive immediately, but since it's Father Thomas!..' And he [M.-D. Philippe] continued to believe that there could be a mix of grace, charisma, demons, that it wasn't right to decide so quickly, and thus condemn, a question of such complexity. He added that after all it wasn't impossible that in the turpitude of the modern world, and as compensation, phenomena of this kind could exist, between particularly pure beings' (*Ibid.*, p. 7); 'I owe it to the truth that nothing happened, outside the knowledge and consent of Father M. Do. [...]' (*Ibid.* p. 5; underlined in the text).

⁴ Cf. *To Understand and to Heal*, pp. 58-62.

From the investigation's perspective, no direct testimonies reach the Holy Office of practices by Father Marie-Dominique similar to those of his brother Thomas, but he is deemed responsible at least for not enlightening people about the seriousness of his brother's actions. The trial resulted in his condemnation by the Holy Office on February 6, 1957, forbidding him from hearing confessions or exercising any form of spiritual guidance. The duration of the sentence was unspecified and could only be lifted by a decision of the Holy Office. Moreover, he was prohibited from teaching subjects related to spirituality and from staying in monasteries. As far as can be judged based on the known facts, it appears that Father Marie-Dominique Philippe largely respected his sentence.

The secrecy of his condemnation was well maintained. Within the Dominican Order, only a few were aware and maintained confidentiality¹. Father Philippe sent his requests directly to Father Michael Browne, the Master General of the Dominicans, who did everything to preserve his reputation. Positioned in his favor from the beginning of the investigation, Browne had intervened several times with the Holy Office to request not to press too hard against him, highlighting that Father Marie-Dominique 'is a very important element for doctrinal rectification' and wishing 'to still utilize his great talents and his doctrinal security in speculative matters in the best possible way for the benefit of the Order and the general doctrinal situation'. The official status of Father Philippe as a professor at Saulchoir and Fribourg, as well as his duly authorized publications during this period, did not then allow for the suspicion that he was under sanctions from the Holy Office. For his part, Father Philippe explained to those around him that he could not give retreats, provide spiritual direction, or teach his courses in Fribourg, due to a task assigned to him by the Master General².

Following multiple threats to the Master General about quitting his teaching role, Father Marie-Dominique secured a full reinstatement in 1959³. Not wanting to lose a brilliant teacher whom he considered doctrinally sound, Father Browne intervened again with the Holy Office to lift the sanctions. To support this request, Father Marie-Dominique solemnly committed in writing to comply with the directives of the Holy Office and the Master General regarding the guidance of souls and confession. We know today that at the time he signed this declaration, he maintained a relationship involving sexual practices with a person named in the report as Nicole B. (since the early 1950s), as well as with Jacqueline d'Halluin (a member of the 'little ones' core). One can suspect, though it is not established, that the same is true with Alix Parmentier, whom he met in 1954. It is established, however, that Father Marie-Dominique maintained a long abusive relationship with Michèle-France Pesneau starting in the early 1970s.

¹ To this day, after inquiries, we do not know if the Congregation for Religious, which twenty years later would assist in the birth of the *Community of Saint John*, was informed of Father Marie-Dominique's condemnation in 1957.

² It was only in 2019, after the archives of the Dominicans of the Province of France were opened to the Brothers of Saint John, that Father Marie-Dominique Philippe's condemnation was made public. Until then, as far as the Family of Saint John was concerned, only a few vaguely knew that the founder had temporary restrictions in his ministry in the late 1950s, related to sanctions imposed on his brother.

³ The 'complete rehabilitation' of Father Marie-Dominique means he is no longer subject to prohibitions in his ministry, not that he is recognized as innocent of the facts for which he was condemned.

FATHER MARIE-DOMINIQUE PHILIPPE

AFTER THE FOUNDATION OF THE COMMUNITY OF SAINT JOHN

(1975-2006)

This section covers the abuses committed or facilitated by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe after the foundation of the Community of Saint John in 1975: his sexual abuses, his practices of accompaniment, his role in the Family of Saint John.

I. SEXUAL ABUSES BY M.-D. PHILIPPE IN THE FAMILY OF ST. JOHN

A. Nature and quantification of the facts

1. Abuses committed against women

It is now known that Father Marie-Dominique Philippe committed sexual abuses against women he was guiding. The identified victims number 24, but it is feared that this number is far lower than the reality. The case of Alix Parmentier ('Sister Alix') is significant, notably because of the role she played in the Family of Saint John; she seems to have lived in a strong emotional and spiritual dependency on Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, in a situation of sexual¹, but especially

¹ It is difficult to have proof in this area. However, several testimonies strongly suggest that the relationship between Father Marie-Dominique Philippe and Alix Parmentier had a sexual dimension. Alix Parmentier joined Father Marie-Dominique Philippe in Fribourg, becoming his secretary. However, their relationship was not merely professional. Father Philippe had the key to her apartment, where he could enter freely and without knocking. Moreover, according to various testimonies, Alix often accompanied Father M.-D. Philippe when he preached retreats in monasteries, which happened regularly. On these occasions, they both stayed at the guesthouse. A witness staying in the room next to Father Philippe's during a retreat at a Carmelite monastery reported hearing clear sexual noises through the partition, though Alix denied it the next day. During a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1985, where there were sisters from Saint John and brothers and sisters from Bethlehem, a sister from Bethlehem realized that Father M.-D. Philippe and Sister Alix were sharing the same hotel room. Finally, the testimony of one of Father M.-D. Philippe's main victims mentions that Sr. Alix told this sister victim, whom she was trying to elicit confidences about her sexual intimacy with Father M.-D. Philippe, that he 'had gone very far in this area with her'. These third-party testimonies, taken separately, may seem somewhat unconvincing, but their convergence is significant. They are also corroborated by letters sent by Alix to Father M.-D. Philippe and found among his papers. Through various cross-references, this entire set of letters can be dated, with little margin of error, to the decade 1985–1995, that is, a period when Alix was at Saint-Jodard, leading the contemplative sisters recently founded by Father M.-D. Philippe. These letters show that Alix was afraid that her correspondence would one day be read by others: 'You know that I no longer like to write and that I fear leaving letters that could be read by others than you...' She often took the precaution of asking Father M.-D. Philippe to tear up her letter. The letters are almost never signed, and when they are, it's with a simple: 'your A.'. Most of the time, the letters end just with a small cross. For more details on this subject and on M.-D. Philippe's spiritual ascendancy over Alix Parmentier, see the report *To Understand and to Heal*, pp. 107–121.

spiritual abuse, although neither probably realized the abusive nature of their relationship. In addition to Alix, the other known victims are: 7 contemplative sisters, 10 apostolic sisters, as well as sisters from other communities and laywomen.

Father Marie-Dominique Philippe's abuses occurred during private meetings, often in the context of confession or spiritual guidance. These included kisses on the face or mouth, caresses, embraces, the act of taking the victim's hand(s) (and sometimes head) to place them on his own genitals (often erect) over his clothing, or even taking the victim's hand to slide it under his garment directly onto his genitals. In some cases, the actions went further (sexual touching, masturbation, oral sex) and were repeated, sometimes for months or years (up to a decade).

2. A State of Dependency

The known abuse situations share many commonalities. They systematically occur in asymmetrical relationships: age difference, moral and religious authority of M.-D. Philippe due to his priesthood as well as his status as master and founder, or his reputation for holiness. The victims' discernment was diminished by great esteem for Father Philippe; they often have family wounds that make them feel they have found a father in him. They find themselves in vulnerable situations and are unable to express their discomfort. Finally, they are led into confusion by gradual gestures, at first ambiguous and then increasingly explicit.

In most cases, few words of explanation accompany the acts, leaving the victims defenseless, struggling to interpret what happened. The majority of victims gradually realize the abnormal nature of the relationship, but a minority becomes dependent on Father Philippe believing they are experiencing something exceptional, a form of grace, a privilege, for which they thanked him and which led to a lasting relationship and a real phenomenon of control. Several letters show that Father Philippe has taken a place in the victims' hearts that should belong only to God, capturing the deep spiritual quest of these individuals. The following letter is particularly telling:

My father, I love you very much, and I want to love you 'until the end'. I don't know if I can express it well, but I want to say how much I love you more and more. It's like I live through you; and if I were to leave your heart, I think I would suffocate. I believe I could no longer live outside of your heart, because the Holy Virgin gives it to me more and more strongly. It's as if I live off you. I wonder how I haven't completely exhausted you yet because I find all my strength in you. Everything that is hard, I do it with you, for you, and I find strength by leaning on your suffering. It's mysterious and I don't quite understand, but that's how it is. I believe the Holy Virgin has given me a lot, given me a great secret; it's a great mystery that brings me so much joy and makes me understand a little of how much I am loved by the Holy Virgin¹.

Few people report that Father M.-D. Philippe asked for their forgiveness, and those who do doubt the sincerity of this approach, perceiving it primarily as a maneuver to secure their silence. When he does apologize, it appears to be because he lacked prudence in not discerning that the person was incapable of understanding his practices. In this view, it is primarily the victim who is at fault, who did not meet his expectations and was not capable of understanding.

3. Abuse of Men

Three cases of abuse against brothers are also known, albeit less severe than those against women (a kiss on the mouth and two instances where he drew the other's hands over his own genitals through his Dominican habit). These actions were always 'surprise' gestures, not within an established control relationship (even if they always occurred in a situation of authority: whether as confessor, superior, or teacher).

B. Accompaniment Practices that Foster Control

The nature of the sexual abuses committed by Marie-Dominique Philippe cannot be fully understood without considering their immediate context: in most cases, it involves personal

¹ Personal archives of Father M.-D. Philippe.

accompaniment (through the sacrament of confession, spiritual guidance, or discernment of vocation).

1. Confusions in the Practice of the Sacrament of Penance

The way Father Philippe celebrated the sacrament of penance helped some people not to feel condemned and to leave with confidence. His very quick way of confessing, quickly moving to absolution, might have satisfied some but also felt like a lack of listening to others.

From the testimonies of sexual abuse, it is evident that the ministry of confession played a significant role in the control M.-D. Philippe exercised over his victims. He repeatedly confessed and absolved individuals he had abused. According to several testimonies, the confession itself sometimes served as a setting for sensual gestures. It may have been an opportunity to test the resistance of certain individuals, as evidenced by a contemplative sister.

People testified that M.-D. Philippe had instructed them to confess only to him regarding sins against chastity. These were not necessarily his own victims; sometimes they were victims of other brothers he was evidently trying to protect. The use of the sacrament of penance thus served to conceal sexual abuses and clouded the conscience of some, damaging their relationship with God. A sister reported that M.-D. Philippe once forced her to confess to him, applying physical pressure to detain her and coercing her with his words.

Furthermore, the very loose framework in which he practiced confession certainly facilitated abuse: outside the confessional, in a parlor, his office, sometimes in a cell, seated on a chair or armchair, with great physical proximity to the penitent, at late or even nocturnal hours¹.

2. Confusion in Spiritual Guidance

Although many people can testify to positive elements received in the spiritual guidance of Father Philippe, it is clear that this ministry was also a place of great confusion, spiritual abuse, and the cause of deep despair for some individuals being guided.

In most cases, Father Philippe was perceived as very non-directive in his approach to guidance; yet he tended to bind people to him emotionally, making some emotionally dependent and failing to respect their autonomy². He sometimes induced infantilization and resignation in individuals; attachment to him could become the almost exclusive content of the accompaniment, fostering inappropriate expectations and anxieties.

In his guidance, M.-D. Philippe's sole demand was obedience to the Virgin Mary, who was supposed to guide the individual³. This approach did not allow people to gain autonomy, sometimes causing anxiety and making them more dependent on him and his judgment. He also claimed to know better than the individual what was good for them and what God expected of them, without paying attention to their feelings or psychological state.

¹ One testimony recounts that once, because he had arrived late and was leaving the next day, Father Philippe confessed an entire convent of sisters while they were already in their night attire; some sisters had been awakened for this purpose. Cf. *To Understand and to Heal*, pp. 149–150.

² He imposed himself as a spiritual father to at least one person, even though she was already being accompanied by someone else.

³ As early as 1950, to a victim of Father Thomas who shared her experiences with his brother, he replied: 'My dear child [...] Everything you tell me is clear. You understand that it is very difficult to give a categorical answer by letter. What I can ask of you is total surrender and absolute trust in the Most Holy Virgin. To entrust everything to Her, be very obedient, beg Her to act only as She wishes, asking to be placed under the influence of the gift of fear so that there are only divine initiatives in total passivity to His Action... By surrendering yourself in this way in total docility and obedience – I believe you then have to be very obedient not to what "he" may ask of you, but to what She may demand – and always referring to Her. This way there is no danger of remaining in a literal, too material obedience – and there is no danger of imprudence, if it is She who is there, and who is very present' (Letter from Father M.-D. Philippe to M. Guéroult, November 23, 1950, III O 59 Eau Vive 2, "L'Affaire" ["The Case"], DAPF).

He often failed to call for conversion and did not provide objective criteria for discernment. Depending on how he perceived the individual and his level of ascendancy over them, his advice could vary and be more or less in line with the Church's moral teaching. Some individuals were thus strengthened in their spiritual struggle; others – particularly perpetrators of sexual abuse – unfortunately did not find the objective criteria of discernment they needed from him. By simply relying on Our Lady, some individuals guided by M-D. Philippe ended up with a weakened conscience, leading them to commit acts whose seriousness they could no longer perceive.

The same unawareness of the objectivity of situations is evident among most of those he guided who committed abuses. Even though some had more restrictive limits, the only clear boundary perceived by most abusers within the Congregation of Saint John was vaginal penetration, considered a strictly conjugal act they consequently needed to avoid¹. Ejaculation, on the other hand, was mostly seen as a humiliating failure, proof that they had not yet reached the stage of mastery and purity they claimed to achieve with God's grace, and a weakness to be entrusted to God's mercy.

While ensuring not to attribute the abuses committed by individuals he accompanied to Father Philippe – each retaining their responsibility and freedom – it must be emphasized that certain biases in Father Philippe's spiritual accompaniment (emotional dimension, claim of knowing God's will for the person, lack of attention to the objectivity of acts and situations, unconditional 'mercy', etc.) weakened consciences and facilitated abuses.

3. Insufficient Consideration of Real Problems in Discerning Vocations

Father Marie-Dominique Philippe broadly welcomed individuals into the Community of Saint John and lacked balanced criteria for discerning and accompanying vocations. These deficiencies were noted as early as 1982 by Dom Bernard de Terris, abbot of the Abbey of Notre-Dame de Lérins, who was tasked with accompanying the Brothers of Saint John: lack of discernment in vocations, lack of human and spiritual formation, especially important for a fragile and often immature youth².

Without defining concrete criteria for discerning vocation, Father Philippe encouraged welcoming the 'young people of today' with their fragilities. He also implemented principles he had often explained, contrasting, for example, 'a discernment in the manner of Marthe [Robin]', 'in divine light', with a discernment 'in the manner of psychoanalysts', excessively minimizing external and human criteria.

In practice, the task of discernment was often nearly reduced to the experience of communal life – testing the candidate's ability to lead a religious life. The task of discernment was largely left to the candidates themselves³. It would be an exaggeration to say that no guidance was provided and that difficulties were completely ignored; however, it was rare for an issue to be seen as an obstacle to religious life, especially in terms of chastity. Some young people were thus encouraged to remain in religious life, even when they opened up about objective difficulties. The trust in 'God's mercy' seems to have sometimes served as the main discernment criterion, regardless of the individuals' concrete abilities to live a religious life⁴.

¹ Setting this boundary was probably a way to maintain the idea among the victims and themselves that what they were doing was not sexual in nature. It is difficult to say to what extent Father M.-D. Philippe is directly responsible for this boundary, which could be inferred from certain statements about the sexual instinct. However, not all abusers respected this boundary. Some, in fact, did not doctrinally justify their sexual practices.

² On this subject, it is very informative to refer to the quotes from Dom Bernard de Terris in the report *To Understand and to Heal*, pp. 156–158.

³ 'For it is very difficult to discern a vocation without seeing someone live, and I always prefer that it be the individual who realizes that they are incapable of leading this kind of life. I prefer this rather than refusing them the chance to try; because, in general, those who have asked to enter cannot understand why they are refused' (M.-D. PHILIPPE, *Les trois sagesse [The Three Wisdoms]*, op. cit., p. 373).

⁴ Father Philippe's main argument for integrating the Marian sisters into the Family of Saint John in 1995 is also indicative in this regard: 'After trying religious life, some young women cannot continue, and they must be able to be welcomed as sisters somewhere in mercy.' In other words, individuals rejected by other communities must find a religious community that will accept them. From the moment someone feels the call to religious life, nothing should obstruct it.

M.-D. Philippe seems to have perceived 'vocation' as an indisputable fact, of divine order, to which everyone can have direct, internal access, without any third-party discernment, apart from the 'spiritual father' whose word is considered inspired and infallible. In this logic, everything must be done to 'save' this vocation, even if it places the individual in a precarious, even dramatic situation. The spiritual father is supposed to know, sometimes better than the individual, God's will for that person, which often, in practice, amounts to making choices for them.

4. Conclusion

Some individuals found themselves under the ascendancy of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, who took up too much space in their lives and did not sufficiently respect the autonomy of the person and their personal dialogue with God¹. The resulting dependency certainly facilitated sexual abuses, which are ultimately just a particular form of control, experienced by only a portion of the people Father M.-D. Philippe guided. Even when there is no question of sexual abuse, control and spiritual abuse can have serious consequences; those sexually abused by M.-D. Philippe often suffer more from the consequences of spiritual abuse than from the sexual abuse itself. While he led many people to give their lives to God with great enthusiasm, some he guided were placed in situations impossible to bear. Sometimes, they felt driven to despair, and their relationship with God was deeply damaged.

II. THE ROLE OF M.-D. PHILIPPE IN THE FAMILY OF SAINT JOHN

Understanding the control exercised by M.-D. Philippe requires addressing the absolutely central role he played in the Family of Saint John.

A. Brief Historical Background on the Family of Saint John

Founded in 1975 in Fribourg, Switzerland, while Father Marie-Dominique was teaching at the Dominican faculty of philosophy, the community of brothers moved to France from 1982. A formation house was established in Rimont (Saône-et-Loire), then in Saint-Jodard (Loire) a year later. This was also the time when the communities of contemplative sisters (1983) and apostolic sisters (1984) were founded, as well as the first apostolic priories of the brothers. From the 1990s, priories were established around the world. The Family of Saint John experienced rapid growth and an influx of numerous vocations.

In 2001, Father Jean-Pierre-Marie became the first Prior General to succeed Father Marie-Dominique, who passed away in 2006. It was in 2013 that Brother Thomas Joachim, elected Prior General in 2010, revealed sexual abuses committed by Father M.-D. Philippe. Following this, a commission for listening and receiving complaints (SOS Abuse) was created. In 2019, the General Chapter of the brothers – the supreme authority of the congregation – significantly distanced itself from Marie-Dominique Philippe and commissioned this report².

¹ This might be the kind of situation that the Abbot of Lérins was alluding to when he wrote that 'the very strong personality of Father Marie-Dominique creates in some young people a motivation that is not personal enough; it is no longer a response to God, but a blind response to a counsel' (Report on the Community of Saint John, September 2, 1982, Lérins file, GACSJ).

² At the same General Chapter, Brother François-Xavier Cazali, former secretary of the Commission SOS Abuse, was elected Prior General.

B. A Role as Intellectual Master, Founder, Prior General, Spiritual Father, and Confessor

1. The Intellectual Master

The intellectual dimension plays a crucial role in the history of the community. Indeed, the first brothers gathered around the teachings of Father M.-D. Philippe. Initially, the idea was not really to found a religious community, but rather to group together to receive Father M.-D. Philippe's teachings to the fullest, which appeared enlightening to these young people who wanted to dedicate their lives to Christ. At a time when the Church was undergoing profound questioning, Father M.-D. Philippe's teaching seemed both new and rooted in the Church's tradition, generating great enthusiasm.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the Family of Saint John formed around the teaching of Father M.-D. Philippe, and that this teaching constituted the heart of the community life at least until his death in 2006. His teachings and homilies were almost all recorded on cassettes, then CDs, which the brothers and sisters disseminated within the community and outside¹. A team of contemplative sisters, under the direction of Sr. Alix, was responsible for transcribing certain teachings, which could, after being reviewed by Father M.-D. Philippe himself, be published. Other individuals, often brothers and sisters, provided translations into various languages², to make Father M.-D. Philippe's teachings available to as many people as possible³.

2. The Founder

While it is natural for Father M.-D. Philippe to have held a special place in the Community of Saint John as its founder, this role was exaggerated by an overemphasis on the founder's role within a community. In hindsight, several texts voted on by the General Chapters of 1997 and 2001 show the disproportionate place the brothers accorded him, not only as an intellectual master but also as God's instrument for the community⁴.

Many elements lent credibility to the idea that trusting this man was legitimate: his reputation for holiness (especially within the Family of Saint John but not only), the prestige of his Dominican status, his intellectual friendship with Pope John Paul II... Through the development of an exaggerated filial piety⁵, an undue focus on his person emerged. Father M.-D. Philippe's word was absolutized by many members of the Family of Saint John.

This exaggerated admiration did not reach the same degree among all brothers and was not shared by all, but it profoundly marked the life of the community⁶. To the point of annoying and worrying the bishop responsible for the congregation and the Dicastery for Consecrated Life, although the latter repeatedly took ambivalent positions, asking for one thing and then cancelling it without remaining firm in its decisions⁷. Following the revelation of sexual abuses committed by Father M.-

¹ The database lists 2140 series of Father Philippe's courses, representing 23,658 hours. To this should be added homilies, chapters, and other interventions that have been recorded.

² A 2008 letter mentions translations into 'more than 13 languages', each with a 'translation committee' (letter from the master of studies, October 1, 2008, GACSJ).

³ 'To discover and develop the way in which Father Philippe's teaching and testimony can be received, deepened, communicated, and "made available" to all (brothers, sisters, oblates, friends ... the Church ... and beyond). We have received freely ... how are we going to give?' (Letter from the master of studies, September 14, 2007, GACSJ).

⁴ Too lengthy to be quoted here, the extensive excerpts available in the report *To Understand and to Heal* (pp. 166–170) are worth a read.

⁵ In the community, he was referred to as 'The Father'. The reaction of Bishop Séguéy to this exaggeration is noteworthy; see: *To Understand and to Heal*, pp. 190–191.

⁶ Some came to distinguish between those who were truly his sons and others, sometimes considered as 'unfaithful to the father'.

⁷ See for example: *To Understand and to Heal*, pp. 186, 191, 193–200.

D. Philippe (2013), the Brothers of Saint John eventually publicly acknowledged having idealized their founder¹.

3. The Prior General

Father M.-D. Philippe naturally became the first Prior General of the Brothers' community. However, since 1986, the authorities (abbatial, episcopal, and Roman) repeatedly urged Father M.-D. Philippe to prepare for his succession and to withdraw from the governance of the institute as soon as possible, with the understanding that he could continue his role as founder until his death. Yet, the authorities never formally ordered the Brothers of Saint John not to elect Father M.-D. Philippe as Prior General. It seems they rather intended to respect their right to elect whom they wished, relying on Father M.-D. Philippe's ability to step down. Father M.-D. Philippe gave many the impression of being detached from power; the reality appears more complex. It seems he did not truly consider stepping down until he resigned in 2001 at the express request of the Church. Whether the reasons were intellectual (his view of his role as founder, of paternity, instrumentality, guidance of the Holy Spirit) or psychological (fear of having to obey another, a narcissistic need to remain at the center of community life and feel indispensable², a need to maintain control, etc.), and even if he was not fully aware of it, the facts lead to the conclusion that he generally behaved ambiguously enough to ultimately remain Prior General.

The attitude of the majority of the brothers, who also seemed unable to envision a change of Prior General, only reinforced this stance. This issue reveals a difficulty in Father M.-D. Philippe and his disciples to truly listen to the ecclesiastical hierarchy when it did not align with their desires³. He likely considered the signs of support from the Pope⁴ more significant than the views of the Bishop of Autun and the Dicastery for Consecrated Life, which were based on a more concrete understanding of the community. As a result, from the standpoint of abuses, this allowed Father M.-D. Philippe to suppress complaints for a long time, as we will see later, and to maintain as much control as possible over the handling of moral issues; in this regard, the fact that he remained Prior General, despite the insistence of Bishop Séguy⁵, had serious consequences.

4. Confusion of Roles

The sexual abuses were greatly facilitated by the multiple roles Father M.-D. Philippe held: founder, Prior General, principal teacher, as well as confessor and spiritual father for many brothers (especially in the early generations). In practice, Father M.-D. Philippe faced almost no limits within the Family of Saint John⁶.

¹ After the General Chapter of 2013, the Prior General, Brother Thomas, wrote to the laypeople close to the community: 'We then deepened the distinction between the charism of the founder and his person. On this occasion, some recognized that they had not been free from a certain idealization' (Letter from Brother Thomas to oblates, friends, and close associates of the community, May 13, 2013, GACSJ). But it was especially the General Chapter of 2019 that marked a turning point in this respect, with a clear distancing from Father Marie-Dominique Philippe: 'The entire General Chapter unequivocally condemns the sexual abuse acts of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe and certain brothers. We are dismayed by this part of our history. The truth-seeking work we have embarked on for several years first concerned our founder and his teaching. The Chapter understands that it is also necessary to take into account lines of influence that have fostered control and abuse in our Community. It must also be considered that sexual abuses were often accompanied or preceded by abuses of conscience and power' (Final message of the first session).

² A brother testifies: 'He always referred to Father Dehau, who told him not to accept authority. I reminded him: "Why have you always told us this, and yet you accepted authority?" For him, not having authority was like being disregarded.' (ACASJ)

³ For more on the complex relationship of M.-D. Philippe with obedience and the institution, see *To Understand and to Heal*, pp. 201–206.

⁴ These signs of support do not imply that Pope John Paul II directly encouraged Father Philippe to remain Prior General. Father Philippe seemed to believe for a long time that as long as the Pope did not ask him to leave his position, it meant he was to keep it.

⁵ Bishop Raymond Séguy (1929–2022) served as Bishop of Gap (1981–1987), then of Autun (1987–2006). As Bishop of Autun, he was the ecclesiastical authority for the Congregation of Saint John and the Apostolic Sisters of Saint John.

⁶ In particular, the distinction between internal and external forums was ineffective in his case, as he himself stated: 'The founder is there as a father and above the distinction of the internal and external forum. As founder, even as Prior General of the Brothers, I can confess any brothers who wish it. It's a permission from Rome. Normally, the Prior General cannot

Being both superior and spiritual mentor to many brothers disrupted both his governance and his spiritual guidance. Often, his interlocutor was unsure of the level on which he was operating.

Certain personality traits (need for approval and admiration, difficulty in dialoguing with someone who has a different position or accepting divergent views, difficulty in dealing with authority and the institution, etc.) had serious consequences on his discernment, his ability to lead a community, and guide individuals.

C. Interventions in the Governance and Lives of the Sisters

To understand Father M.-D. Philippe's central role in the Family of Saint John as a whole, it is necessary to mention his involvement in the governance of the sisters.

1. An Ambiguous Concept of Womanhood

Father M.-D. Philippe's teachings on women were marked by a certain idealization, linked to his Marian devotion inherited from Father Dehau. His perspective, whose relevance is not the subject of discussion here, could have impacted his view of women, how the sisters experienced their femininity, and the consideration of the two sister communities within the Family of Saint John¹.

As for his actual attitude towards women, the testimonies are quite contradictory: some felt very respected and listened to; others, on the contrary, felt disregarded. The sexual abuses themselves and the lack of consideration he showed to his victims when he rejected them obviously also manifest indifference or a certain contempt.

Thus, there is a significant ambivalence in Father M.-D. Philippe's attitude towards women in general: on one hand, great idealization and respectful behaviors, but also actions that caused severe wounds and a feeling of being disrespected.

2. Relationship with the Community of Contemplative Sisters

Father M.-D. Philippe does not seem to have intervened much in the governance of the contemplative sisters, as Sister Alix had taken charge from the beginning, in 1982². He himself did not claim to lead a female community. This community actually formed as much from Sister Alix's conception of contemplative life as from Father M.-D. Philippe's teaching. Regarding the practical way of life, at least initially, it was Sister Alix who decided, in consultation with Father M.-D. Philippe and by invoking his authority³. Whatever his exact role in Sister Alix's decisions, Father M.-D. Philippe had a significant influence: he provided spiritual guidance through chapters and lectures, conveying his own vision of female and contemplative religious life. His teachings deeply marked the sisters⁴.

simultaneously be the regular confessor for the brothers. Spiritual fatherhood is much more important to me than being Prior General'. (General Chapter of the Apostolic Sisters, September 1989, AAPS). It was not possible to determine which permission Father Philippe was referring to. No document in the congregation's archives supports this claim, which is the only evidence of it we have found. Perhaps he was alluding to a conversation with a prefect or a secretary of a dicastery.

¹ He saw women as the pinnacle of creation, Mary as the Woman par excellence, performing the same redemptive work as her Son, in the highest cooperation of a creature with God's work; a mystery of reception and surrender, of maternity, compassion, mercy, in total dependence on Jesus.

² It was not possible to consult the archives of the sisters, some of which have been destroyed. This would undoubtedly have helped to better assess the extent to which Father Philippe's participation in General Chapters or councils was decisive.

³ He also co-wrote the rule of life for the sisters with Sister Alix.

⁴ Father M.-D. Philippe's role among the contemplative sisters was not limited to his own interventions; Sister Alix attributed an excessive importance to Father M.-D. Philippe in the sisters' lives, to the point that their spiritual life sometimes seemed centered more on him than on God. This is how some experienced it. Within the Family of Saint John, some felt uneasy, attributing it, more or less consciously, to their inability to 'make it', 'to do as' the admired older brothers or sisters. The feeling of incapacity leads to self-doubt, and it's probably also for this reason that control easily breeds despair. While the sisters received little or no formation on the Bible, spiritual authors, and Church Fathers, they were encouraged to note down Father M.-D. Philippe's words and to nourish themselves with them. In the community, the sisters were expected to outwardly show signs of their anticipation for Father M.-D. Philippe. A sister testifies: 'We had to find it very hard to miss

3. Relationship with the Community of Apostolic Sisters

The history of Father M.-D. Philippe's interventions among the apostolic sisters is very different. Initially, he was heavily involved. Unlike the contemplative sisters, who had an experienced religious figure like Sister Alix, the apostolic sisters had no such person. Moreover, Father M.-D. Philippe never had the same closeness with the general superiors of the apostolic sisters, who first received him as the founder of the community, 'with a gaze of faith'. The archives of the apostolic sisters show that Father M.-D. Philippe was heavily involved in councils and General Chapters during the early years. He did not necessarily seek to impose his ideas, feeling not very competent in female religious life, but it was obviously difficult to go against his opinion when he expressed one. However, there too, he focused more on the overall direction and the spiritual aspect, even if he could give his opinion on concrete issues.

Father M.-D. Philippe's influence among the apostolic sisters was not only through his teaching and participation in governance bodies but also through personal encounters. The early sisters were accustomed to addressing Father M.-D. Philippe directly, who often accompanied them for years. The superiors struggled to find their place, as the sisters were more attuned to what Father M.-D. Philippe said, and as he tended to adapt, this caused much confusion in the community initially. He could tell a sister that the Prior Generaless should resign, while later denying he said it. It happened several times that Father M.-D. Philippe told a sister not to confide in her superior, especially regarding sexual abuses, under the pretext that the superior could not understand. He even responded to superiors who were concerned about sisters (victims) entrusted to them, who seemed to be increasingly unwell, that he was aware and was personally taking care of these sisters. These interferences prevented the superiors from understanding what was happening.

At some point, difficult to date precisely, Father M.-D. Philippe distanced himself from the apostolic sisters¹. Without severing ties with them, he visited their motherhouse and novitiate in Semur-en-Brionnais (Saône-et-Loire) less frequently. This distancing was likely more emotional and did not prevent the sisters from following his teachings or maintaining a personal connection with him. The apostolic sisters' closeness with the Bishop of Autun seemed to be perceived by Father M.-D. Philippe as a lack of trust in him. It is certain that for a long time, some apostolic sisters felt unloved by Father M.-D. Philippe. Many have testified to this. They felt that the contemplative sisters were preferred by Father M.-D. Philippe. However, towards the end of his life, as his relationship with the contemplative sisters became complicated, Father M.-D. Philippe grew closer to the apostolic sisters. He taught in Semur until his death in 2006. Presumably, he felt better received as a founder.

4. His Role in the Relationship Between the Two Communities

Over the years, the relationship between the contemplative and apostolic sisters was marked by jealousy, sometimes disdain, and Father M.-D. Philippe was not entirely uninvolved.

By giving privileged emphasis to the contemplative aspect of female vocation, Father M.-D. Philippe seemed to give priority to the contemplative sisters. Sister Alix definitely used this to foster a form of disdain among the contemplative sisters towards the apostolic sisters². Even publicly, a certain honorary primacy was often given to the contemplative sisters, for example in seating arrangements

even one of his classes. We were supposed to feel it as a painful deprivation (otherwise we were lacking in loyalty to Father Philippe!)

¹ This distancing was painfully felt. The apostolic sisters sought to show fidelity to Father Philippe. They feared he might stop visiting them. 'For the novices and temporarily professed sisters, there was no choice but to see Father Philippe. "Dodging" to avoid seeing him was considered disobedience. In fact, it felt like committing a crime' (testimony of a sister). A former sister said she had been made to feel guilty for not going to see the father: 'We were urged to fill the interview lists because the sisters were afraid he wouldn't come to Semur.' In their eyes, Father Philippe was 'full of wisdom and discernment: the sisters received his advice and suggestions as God's will for them. The brothers strongly encouraged turning to Father Philippe for all vocational discernment questions [...]. The superiors did not hesitate to extensively quote Father Philippe during community chapters, and we often had opportunities to pick quotes from Father Philippe during liturgical celebrations. This fostered among the sisters a strong conviction that Father Philippe was a saint' (Testimony of a sister).

² This does not mean that all the contemplative sisters shared this disdain, which in reality was not widespread.

at mass: it seemed normal that the apostolic sisters were often placed behind the contemplative sisters. During events and gatherings of the Family of Saint John, the pilgrimages organized, the apostolic sisters could feel that they were not regarded in the same way.

SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE FAMILY OF SAINT JOHN (1975-2022)

I. ABUSES COMMITTED BY BROTHERS

A. Nature and Quantification of Sexual Abuses Committed by Brothers

Excluding the victims of Father Marie-Dominique, and a few people sexually abused by sisters¹, at least 167 individuals (adults and minors) suffered sexual abuse by 72 brothers². Among these, 9 (including 5 priests) committed abuses on minors under 15 years old³; 12 (including 7 priests) on minors aged 15 to 18 years; 51 (including 40 priests) only on adults.

These abuses cover acts of varying nature: words of solicitation or harassment, various gestures (kisses, caresses on the body, breasts), genital acts (genital touching, masturbation), rapes (fellatio, anal or vaginal penetration)⁴. In more than half of the cases, the acts concerned only one victim; however, some brothers abused several people, sometimes concurrently.

The extent of abuses can be distinguished according to three periods:

- 1975-1990: no abuses on minors are recorded, but already a good dozen abuses on adults, as well as acts where abuse is not clearly established but involve sexual acts with justifications linked to the doctrine of Father M.-D. Philippe. The victims are mainly sisters and brothers.

¹ 6 sisters have been identified as perpetrators of sexual abuse.

² As some of them are deceased or have left the Congregation, this number should not be evaluated based on the current number of brothers in the Community, but in reference to the 871 individuals who have professed in our Institute. Of the 72 brothers who committed abuses: 35 have left or asked to leave the community, which is nearly half; 6 have been convicted by a state court, to our knowledge 10 investigations are still ongoing and at least 12 complaints have been dismissed by the prosecutor's office; 18 brothers have been found guilty in a canonical procedure (6 priests have been dismissed from the clerical state; 12 have received a temporary sentence); 7 priests have requested to leave the clerical state and religious life, before the judgment, which ended the procedure; 7 canonical procedures are still ongoing to our knowledge (2 procedures concerning former brothers are not the responsibility of the Congregation of Saint John); 4 brothers have been dismissed from the community (including 2 who were not dismissed from the clerical state); 21 have been subject to disciplinary sanctions.

³ Of these 9 brothers, 4 also committed abuses on minors over 15 years old, but are counted here referring to the youngest victim.

⁴ See the summary of statistics in the appendix of the report.

- 1990-2006: this period includes an expansion of abuses, especially in the apostolic priories where 2/3 of them occurred. They mainly involve adult women (religious or lay). During this period, the first abuses on minors appear.
- 2006-2022: the abuses continue and then significantly decrease, without completely stopping¹. These years are marked by the gradual awareness of a 'systemic' problem in the community and by the revelation of abuses committed by the founder. During this period, internal procedures are put in place, in cooperation with civil and canonical justice; cases are progressively handled more responsibly and objectively.

1. Abuses Committed in Formation Houses

Numerous abuses were committed in the formation houses, by formators or persons in authority, sometimes by brother confessors who did not have direct religious authority over the victim other than the priesthood. At least ten formators, including Father Philippe and Sister Alix, committed abuses on brothers or sisters in formation. Between 1975 and 1990, at least 3 victims were recorded; 44 between 1990 and 2006²; and 24 for the period from 2006 to 2022³. Most victims are brothers and sisters in formation, but not only.

The position of formator, with the trust it entails, obviously played a major role in these abuses, as did the intellectual justification of the gestures or the trust that Father M.-D. Philippe evidently had in these formators and that he recommended to the victims who sometimes questioned the nature of the acts. The acts often took place in the formator's office, in the context of their formation function, or in a parlor, in the context of spiritual accompaniment⁴. The asymmetry of the relationship falsifies consent, which is sometimes subtly solicited by giving the appearance of delicacy and respect for freedom. The victims often speak of the fear inspired by their abuser, which led them to accept acts that in reality they wanted to refuse.

These abuses committed by formators on people in formation and rationalized⁵ had particular consequences, as the consciences of the young religious abused were distorted, as well as their conception of religious life, and their ability to choose this state of life freely and lucidly.

Paradoxically, the congregation's desire for advanced philosophical formation was accompanied by a lack of attention to human formation. Psychology, while not completely ignored, was looked down upon as dealing with 'conditioning', and thus largely discredited. This mistrust of psychology prevented the recognition of tendencies surprisingly close to the spirit of the 1968 movement, which the brothers criticized. Emotional bonds between brothers and sisters seem to have been quite common in the early decades, with confusion between spiritual friendship and romantic relationships.

¹The number of abuses committed in the Family of Saint John between 2006 and 2022 is still high but is marked by a decrease. As time progresses, the number of known abuses decreases, and this trend started a little before 2013. This could be partly explained by the fact that recent abuses have not yet been reported, as victims often need time to become aware of the abuses and talk about them. However, it can be hoped that the revelation of abuses committed by brothers, notably by Father M.-D. Philippe (in 2013), and the progress in the formation of the brothers, have led to a reduction in abuse. The typology of victims has also evolved: young women represent a smaller proportion than in the previous period, and abuses on minors under 15 have almost ceased during this period. The most notable fact seems to be the near-disappearance of abuses committed by formators on religious in formation: it is hoped that this restricts the risk of transmission of abusive practices.

² 20 in Saint-Jodard, 12 in Rimont, 8 in Semur, 3 in Saltillo, 1 in Princeville.

³ These took place in Saint-Jodard, Rimont, Princeville, and Monterrey.

⁴ It happened that young brothers and sisters in formation were invited to spend time or even the whole night in a formator's cell. Some did not accept this proposal, but others let themselves be convinced, sometimes after great emotional blackmail and persuasive argumentation. A sister who was afraid of being caught interpreted the absence of brothers in the corridors during her trips to join a brother in his cell as a 'confirmation that it was indeed a divine permission'.

⁵ According to the testimonies, the justifications used were more based on the philosophy of love of friendship than on mystical themes. These actions were allegedly gestures of 'tenderness', deemed 'pure' because they lacked penetration. 'Tenderness is a way of expressing love. Nakedness is the gift.' 'Love is expressed through gestures.' Such gestures were also suggested as means of inner healing. In some cases, there were actual declarations of love, even though the brother might have been involved in other relationships at the same time. Sometimes, the justifications could be spiritual. A brother referred to the return of the prodigal son, whom his father 'covered with kisses' (Lk 15:20). To a sister who confided being troubled by the sexual desires aroused by his actions, a brother replied that perhaps the Virgin Mary wanted this and that she should pray. Father M.-D. Philippe's authority was sometimes used as justification.

The lack of framework, the absence of clear guidelines in the realm of chastity, and deficiencies in formation allowed a significant number of brothers and sisters to engage in friendships that could include a romantic and sentimental dimension, with or without intimate gestures.

Some thus thought they were practicing Father Philippe's teachings on friendship by initiating relationships in which words and actions went beyond the limits set by the vow of chastity as understood by the Church, and they were sometimes encouraged in this by Father Philippe's guidance¹. At the very least, Father Philippe's teaching, which tended to apply certain elements characteristic of a romantic relationship to all friendships, stirred desires in a religious formation environment that were not compatible with religious life, leading to much confusion, fostering unchaste bonds, and even sexual abuses. This should not lead to the conclusion that all brothers and sisters experienced such emotional bonds during their years of formation. Most seem to have been preserved from this, whether due to their family upbringing, Christian formation, human maturity, good accompaniment, or other reasons. It is not possible to estimate the proportion of people concerned².

The environment in which the brothers and sisters were trained was partly unhealthy. The apparent dynamism of the formation houses, with the joy and enthusiasm of youth, masked significant discomforts. There were numerous departures during this time³, and some were linked to experienced abuses, sexual or otherwise. The first steps in religious life were sometimes completely distorted by these abuses⁴. However, it should not be assumed that all formators were unhealthy and knowingly cooperated with these deviations. Some even tried to improve things, but a real cleansing would have required an awareness of what was really happening and of the systemic nature of problems that were considered individual cases.

2. The Abuse of Lay People

As mentioned earlier, numerous abuses were perpetrated in the apostolic priories. A significant number of them involved adult women – mostly between 18 and 30 years old – who had a strong spiritual demand, who regularly attended the priories of the Brothers of Saint John, as part of a 'school of life' (year of Christian formation), or during special events like camps or formation sessions, or in a parish context. In many cases, a strong ascendancy was established, allowing the brothers to take advantage of the situation to commit acts of abuse, often progressively, and with intellectual justifications that these young women were all the more sensitive to as they had been genuinely enlightened by these brothers on certain points.

The brothers who committed these abuses benefited from the aura of the Community of Saint John, they used Father Philippe's teaching, and were sometimes approved by their spiritual fathers. The ascendancy established was of the same nature as that observed in the abuses committed by formators in religious life. The same justifications, the same failure of spiritual guidance and the ministry of confession, and the same practices are found, except for the few cases of complete sexual relations (which may have seemed possible to some since these women were not consecrated).

The consequences of these abuses on adult people varied: loss of vocation, guilt, trauma of having their first sexual experience with a priest, undesired celibacy, difficulties in affective and sexual life, spiritual difficulties... Many victims have had to undergo or are still undergoing therapy. Some became anorexic, were hospitalized in psychiatric services, were tempted by suicide or actually

¹ It should be emphasized that many others assimilated Father Philippe's teachings on friendship without seeing it as encouragement to maintain ambiguous relationships.

² In the early days of the community, many brothers received an incomplete formation, including in their studies. Some were ordained having completed less than two years of theology. Paradoxically, confidence in the solidity of the formation given by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe sometimes resulted in an abbreviation of intellectual, and therefore religious and spiritual, formation. On several occasions, Father Philippe did not hesitate to accept the profession or ordination of a brother whom he knew explicitly was experiencing significant difficulties regarding the vow of chastity.

³ 159 professed brothers left the Community of Saint John between 1990 and 2006.

⁴ A former sister recounts her novitiate experience: 'Externally, I tried to save face by presenting a joyful image of myself, while internally I felt broken. At the beginning of the novitiate, I told myself: I have to do like everyone else, so no one will ask me what's wrong' (ACASJ).

attempted suicide. The 2019 Commission SOS Abuse report described the consequences for the victims:

The consequences for the victims are not limited to the wounds caused by the gestures. The justifications, the paternal or authority relationship in general, the intellectual and spiritual prestige of the abusers, also have very harmful consequences for the victim.

A frequent consequence we have observed is the ambiguity of feelings in which the victim is mired, feeling both attachment to the abuser and great anger for the injustice done to them.

The psychologist of the Commission noted the parallel between the trauma observed in cases of abuse by a spiritual father and the ravages caused by incest. But to the physical and psychological destructive consequences is added the anxiety of losing spiritual bearings. It is not only the body and the psyche that are damaged, but the most intimate core of the person and therefore their entire identity.

Victims often bear a painful conflict of loyalty towards the brother who, otherwise, sometimes did good in their life and may feel guilty about what happened. The induced guilt is increased when the brother's external behavior was marked by gentleness and respect, when he endeavored to ask the person's permission to go further, or even when he told the person that he was leaving the initiative of gestures to them. For this reason also, undertaking a process to talk about what happened is a considerable ordeal¹.

3. Abuses of Minors

To date, 45 minor victims have been identified (25 under 15 years old, 20 over 15 years old), for acts committed by 21 brothers.

The abuses on minors aged 15 to 17 are quite similar to those committed on young adults, particularly in terms of the modus operandi and justifications. The facts, especially regarding girls, often occurred in the context of spiritual guidance (sometimes including the sacrament of penance) and were often rationalized. The exact nature of the acts is not always known; however, they can include harassment, embraces, caresses, kisses, touching (often over clothing and sometimes under), masturbation, propositions for sexual relations, and at least one case where the brother rubbed himself fully clothed on the person simulating sexual acts. For many, it was not a single act but part of relationships that lasted several months, even years, during which a real dominance was established.

The abuses of minors under 15 concern 25 children aged 7 to 14 years old. This is a minimum number, not only because it can be estimated that some victims have not yet come forward, but also because the name and age of some victims mentioned by third parties to the authorities have not been specified. In several cases, the facts are not well known to the Congregation of Saint John, either because the victims have preferred to turn to state justice or because investigations are ongoing. Sometimes it was a single act and the justifications are either non-existent or limited to a few words (the youngest victims fall into this category); in other cases, the abuses occurred in a relationship of trust, lasting several months or years, sometimes with more elaborate justifications.

The consequences of these abuses, when known, have sometimes been dramatic, as shown in this excerpt from a press article reporting the words of a victim during a trial:

Gathering all her strength to recount the unthinkable, Charlotte² expresses how doubt and guilt have incessantly tormented her since the day 'when life changed'. 'I knew he had done something to me but I didn't know if it was right or wrong. For me, an adult, especially a religious one, couldn't do evil, especially since I admired him, while a child always makes mistakes.'

She then kept silent and shut herself away in unspeakable suffering. The once-jovial little girl lost her zest for life: 'I was all the more ashamed of what happened because, at the moment, I felt pleasure.'

Over the years, she pursued a slow path of self-destruction. Self-mutilations, scars, second-degree burns with an iron, four suicide attempts³.

¹ 2019 Commission SOS Abuse Report.

² Charlotte is a pseudonym.

³ Website of the newspaper *La Croix*, May 22, 2015.

These assaults have had severe consequences on all victims, although they are not always identical. Several reported serious difficulties in their emotional life, studies, and professional life, which they attribute to the abuse suffered in their childhood. Some had to undergo long therapies and are still in a precarious situation today, both psychologically and sometimes financially. These sexual abuses have also sometimes had severe family consequences.

Despite their significant number, it can be noted that cases of abuse on minors under fifteen years mostly relate to the personal issues of their perpetrators (pedophilic tendencies, attraction to young adolescents). They are quite different from what we have seen so far for minors over fifteen or adults, in that the part of doctrinal justifications is weak or non-existent. However, they are not entirely unrelated to the systemic problems of the Family of Saint John, notably due to deficiencies in discerning vocations, vigilance, handling complaints, and accompanying aggressors. In some cases, Father Philippe or other authorities were aware of a brother's problems from his years of formation, either through the brother himself who opened up, through a victim, or because problems appeared during initial formation. To date, the justice system has been notified of all known cases within the community.

II. MANAGEMENT OF ABUSES

A. The Significant Role of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe in Abuses Committed by Others

Even when he was aware of abuses committed by others, Father Philippe did not try to dissuade the perpetrators¹ or protect the victims. In some cases, he only sought to verify that the intention was good, which can be considered a subtle form of approval, or affirmed that it was a form of therapy. In several cases, he encouraged victims to trust the abuser or told them it was 'a great grace'. He did not necessarily encourage the acts very explicitly, but he approved, provided justifications, and gave more than ambiguous or inappropriate advice.

In the years 1975-1990, out of the 11 recorded abuses, Father Philippe was aware of 10. He was then at the center of abuses committed in the Family of Saint John, either as the abuser, spiritual guide, confidant, or as a teacher, since arguments were drawn from his courses. The proportion of abuses he knew about decreased significantly from the 1990s, gradually reaching about one-tenth of the situations. A significant part of the abusers were no longer accompanied by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe but rather by some of his spiritual sons, often themselves abusers approved by him.

The spiritual and governing authority of M.-D. Philippe enabled him to cover up abuses and restrict the flow of information².

B. Handling of Abuses Until the 2000s

When 'moral cases' emerged, they were not always treated in council, but often personally by Father Philippe, in conjunction with one or two brothers.

Until the 2000s, the focus of the Prior General's council was on the brothers, to treat them or possibly defend them (especially in the case of a brother being legally challenged). Victims were not given

¹ That doesn't mean he couldn't have encouraged some of the brothers who confided in him to live a chaste life.

² The influence of Alix Parmentier extends, in a way, that of Father Philippe. Sister Alix, who played a significant role in the early years, has been accused by two brothers of sexual behavior towards them. It is possible that the number of her victims is higher, although this remains hypothetical. In the two attested cases, there is talk of actual initiation, involving both acts and justifications, as well as subsequent approval by Father Philippe. Furthermore, Sister Alix also influenced the contemplative sisters in a way that favored sexual abuses by Father Philippe or brothers, and, in general, unchaste relationships.

attention, nor were the consequences of the acts they suffered, even when they were minors¹. Brothers deemed 'cured' or having shown signs of awareness were returned to apostolic life, with new responsibilities, most of the time without the brother's direct superior even knowing there had been incidents concerning them. Reporting to state and canonical justice did not seem conceivable. The decisions made show a lack of understanding of what pedocriminality is. Sometimes, pedophile brothers were reassigned to missions involving children...

Regarding abuses of adults, this category did not exist in the minds of Father Philippe and his council. They did not consider the asymmetry of the relationship (as in spiritual guidance, for example), nor any potential ascendancy that could distort consent.

Towards the end of the 1990s, there was greater use of psychological accompaniment and a concern that it should bear fruit; however, this did not change the common perception of the value of therapies, often seen as a last resort for really difficult cases.

C. Slowness in Taking Initial Measures

The first call to implement preventative measures against pedophilia dates back to 1998, but this did not lead to the development of procedures or firmly upheld decisions.

From 2001, despite fairly good information about pedophilia and the obligation to report it, the management of specific cases showed a significant lack in awareness of the problem and in the measures taken. The possibility of making a report to the authorities does not seem to have been discussed in council. Attention remained focused on the brother, with the intent to treat him. Victims were little considered, even if sometimes a request for forgiveness was asked of the guilty party. Few sanctions were taken, probably because any sanction would have been felt by many counselors as a lack of mercy.

The first report to civil justice was made in 2007 in a case involving a former brother, but it was not until the mid-2010s that this became a normal and habitual procedure. During this time, following several successive scandals involving pedophile brothers, the community began to make a real turn in how it dealt with cases.

It was in 2015 that specific procedures were established, and the Commission SOS Abuse was created. A better understanding of what constitutes sexual abuse gradually led to a better consideration of different abuses (of power, spiritual, etc.).

D. The Community of Saint John Increasingly Facing Scrutiny

The successive questionings of the community played a role in the slow realization of the abuse issues within it.

Despite a constant influx of vocations, the 1990s saw an increase in departures from the Family of Saint John. Concerns from some bishops about the human formation of the brothers were noted. Families of brothers and sisters worried about the freedom of their children, and suspicions of sectarian deviations began to emerge. Press campaigns and several scandals affected public opinion and the members of the Congregation.

In the 2000s, an internal crisis revolving around the place of Father Philippe as master and founder triggered the departure of several brother professors. The Church's accompaniment became more insistent, notably through interventions by the ordinary bishop of the community and the appointment of a religious assistant, but the focus was mainly on the discernment of vocations, the

¹ According to the CIASE report, this is not unique to the Congregation of Saint John: 'While sexual violence primarily concerns the people who are victims of it, the response of the Catholic Church has primarily focused on the clerics and religious who were the perpetrators and the consequences of their acts for the ecclesiastical institution...' (*Les violences sexuelles dans l'Église catholique. France 1950–2020 [Sexual violence in the Catholic Church. France 1950–2020]*, §0802, p. 296).

predominant place of Father Marie-Dominique as a teacher, or doubts about the brothers' ability to survive after the founder's departure; the teaching and morals of the founder or brothers were not really questioned, at least not as a systemic phenomenon.

Apart from a report produced in 2002 by the SAM¹, which had very limited distribution, the only person who identified certain problems and sought to address them was Bishop Séguy². Becoming more deeply engaged in the community's guidance, he wrote a canonical admonition in February 2000 to all perpetually professed brothers, inviting them to examine their conscience regarding religious vows; in 2005, he also wrote a comprehensive report summarizing 18 years of accompanying the Community of Saint John for the Roman authorities.

Until 2006, a pivotal year both because it is the year of Father Philippe's death and the departure of Bishop Séguy, no one seems to have been aware of the depth of the problem. But 2006 is also a turning point because it is the year when the sexual abuses committed by Father Philippe and a few other brothers on adults began to be revealed to the ecclesiastical authorities. From there, gradually, over a few years, the issue of sexual abuse came to the forefront of concerns regarding the Family of Saint John, allowing for a deeper questioning.

III. THE SYSTEMIC NATURE OF THE ABUSE³

The sexual abuses committed in the Family of Saint John cannot be fully understood if considered as isolated acts, unrelated to each other, because they are partly linked to group dysfunctions. These are not peripheral phenomena that occurred in an organism that would have been healthy in itself, but they are linked to a system where Father M.-D. Philippe's ascendancy is central. Without this ascendancy, which turned into abdication of conscience or even a form of idolatry for some, the discernment of vocations, management of personal difficulties, handling of moral affairs and abuses in particular, and cooperation with Church authorities could have been much healthier, and many abuses could have been avoided. A constellation of elements thus formed a system contributing to the existence of numerous abuses of different types in the Community of Saint John.

A. A System of Ascendancy?

This section focuses on various elements that question the existence of a problem at the level of the system itself: common justifications, various degrees of complicity among community members, and a certain transmission of practices.

1. The Troubling Existence of Common Justifications

In 2010, while dealing with several cases involving Brothers of Saint John, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was concerned to see common justifications reappearing from one case to another, used by several brothers for the acts committed and to impose secrecy on the victims. These justifications, seemingly inspired by Father Marie-Dominique's teaching on love of friendship and sexuality, led the Roman congregation to request Father Philippe's works for review. After this study, they did not find obvious deviations from Catholic doctrine.

The existence of these common justifications supports the fact that the abuses at Saint John are systemic; although it should be noted that they are not found in all instances of sexual abuse within

¹ Service Accueil Médiation for religious and community life, created shortly before by the French Bishops' Conference. It is very useful to refer to the excerpts cited in *To Understand and to Heal*, pp. 351–353 and in TANGI CAVALIN, *L'Affaire [The Case]* pp. 118–123.

² Concerning Bishop Séguy's role in the questioning, refer particularly to chapters 7, 12, and 13 of the report *To Understand and to Heal*.

³ The term 'systemic', not to be confused with 'systematic', refers here to systemics, as the analysis of the system to which an individual belongs, the interactions, and relationships within this system.

the Family of Saint John, and are not always identical, as if they were part of a well-defined doctrinal corpus¹.

Among the justifications put forward, many do not explicitly pertain to mysticism or spirituality, but rather to the theme of friendship, although the boundary between the two is not always clearly defined. Whether in philosophy or theology, the justifications used by abusers only extended aspects of Father Philippe's public teaching, so much so that the boundary between public teaching and arguments given in individual accompaniment to justify acts was not always perceptible. Often, justifications did not directly concern sexual practices but more broadly what Christian life is, sin, purification, mercy, grace, the motion of the Holy Spirit, etc. Many truths in themselves were thus taken out of context and distorted.

2. Different Forms of Complicity

Various individuals involved in sexual abuse sometimes protected each other. The most common case is likely that of the spiritual guide who approves unhealthy acts or emotional relationships contrary to religious life. However, spiritual guidance was not the only area of complicity: Father Philippe knew much and did not act, even when he was approached in his role as a governing authority. This inaction can be interpreted as serious complicity. He also sometimes defended certain brothers and protected them², particularly by asking for silence from victims or witnesses. These direct complicities are added to by discretion and a desire to leave no traces by not archiving documents or not writing things explicitly.

More generally, other aspects can be considered as a kind of complicity, such as minimizing or considering normal things that are abnormal in fraternal conversations³. It is particularly important to highlight a passive complicity – likely the most common form – that was maintained by a sense of guilt originating in Father Philippe's teachings, but also perpetuated by some brothers: the refusal to question a brother's behavior so as not to play into the hands of the devil, 'the accuser of our brothers' (Rev 12:10), the prohibition of 'judging the intentions' of one's brother, the directive to extend 'mercy' unconditionally, even at the risk of neglecting justice, or even truth... The principle of respecting the presumption of innocence seemed to forbid any investigation, the prohibition of defamation guilted those who wanted to prevent new abuses. This multifaceted guilt, combined with a form of naivety that makes one incapable of seeing or suspecting evil, explains why abnormal situations did not elicit reactions. Thus, too often, the perpetrators were more protected than the victims, in a blindness and self-righteousness that is surprising *in retrospect*, but in which one must not forget the role of ascendancy.

3. A Degree of Transmission of Practices

There does not seem to have been a deliberate intent to initiate people to enter a group, as was the case at Eau Vive. Everything related to 'initiation' took place from person to person, within the very relationship of abuse, initiated by a person not aiming to make an additional follower, but rather to authorize transgressive practices.

A lot of the reasoning employed to convince the abused individual comes from Father Philippe's public teachings. One might even wonder if the most important place of transmission of the doctrine is not the public teaching, namely the courses and books of Father Philippe and some of his disciples, to which the abuser refers more spontaneously as they themselves sought elements of understanding their practices or practices they endured. Several people concerned said they were comforted by Father Philippe's teaching in which they found ideas that fueled their understanding of friendship and the bonds they maintained. The courses could thus be read on several levels.

¹ For the study of these doctrinal justifications, see the theological part of the report.

² It is necessary to mention that some knew how to manipulate him to obtain what they desired.

³ Thus, a brother who opened up to another about his concerns regarding what he had experienced with Sister Alix received this response: 'It's ridiculous, it makes no sense, there's nothing unhealthy about it, there's no problem.'

However, was it Father Philippe's intention to transmit sexual practices? One might wonder if it is not more accurate to understand that he himself taught according to what he lived; his teaching was *de facto* marked by his practices, not only in what he affirmed but perhaps especially in what he omitted or distorted. Such teaching could only resonate with the faults of individuals whose conscience had already been distorted, and who easily found justification for their practices¹.

The majority of the courses, regardless of their intellectual value, had nothing to do with sexual abuses. They often consisted of philosophical or theological propositions based on the works of Aristotle or Saint Thomas, or on Holy Scripture. Father Philippe's teaching convinced many people who had absolutely nothing to do with sexual abuses. However, certain doctrinal elements could have repercussions in the context of abuse². Not all of Father Philippe's disciples and people he guided were initiated into sexual practices. Among the abusers, those who believe they have access to a superior knowledge exclusive to a few and convey it in their practices are a minority. Nonetheless, it must be noted that Father Philippe's position as a teacher had the collateral effect of building his authority; this moral and intellectual authority also helped to consolidate the position of other brothers who were abusers and who relied on his teaching as a means of exerting their ascendancy³.

B. Conclusion: a 'Web of Ascendancy'

To succinctly describe what happened in the Family of Saint John, the commission proposes, without claiming to be original, to speak of a 'Web of Ascendancy.' Indeed, the personal relationship of accompaniment appears to be at the center of the abuses committed in the Family of Saint John, whether it be spiritual accompaniment or accompaniment by an external religious authority. Within the ascendancy exerted by Father Philippe on the community and on some of its members more particularly, a large number of other relationships of ascendancy found a place. These relationships, which could have developed differently elsewhere, found in the Family of Saint John, shaped largely by Father Philippe, i.e., around his person and his teaching, but also his own psychological flaws, a favorable environment.

Among those who committed abuses, many were themselves under the ascendancy of Father Philippe or someone else⁴. Certain behaviors spread through the imitation of Father Philippe, or through the absolutization of his intellectual and moral authority. In the community, some people were not affected by sexual deviations or relationships of ascendancy; however, the conception of spiritual life, the relationship with God, personal relationships, intellectual life, and religious life, which was often unconsciously conveyed at Saint John, opened up possibilities for ascendancy behaviors, while also transmitting just and traditional values.

The major issue of abuse in the Community of Saint John thus seems to be that of ascendancy, which has manifested in various forms. The ascendancy of Father Philippe on the community appears as a kind of model or matrix that carried the other ascendancy and which manifested through them in different ways. In turn, a few more influential individuals, brothers or sometimes sisters, replicated ascendancy similar to that of Father Philippe over a more or less large number of people, most often through spiritual guidance, teaching, or the exercise of religious authority.

¹The fact that the abusers' justifications resonated with the teachings given in classes, spiritual guidance, and sometimes even the words of superiors, was of great significance, as it left individuals isolated with their moral dilemmas, feeling as though everyone around them shared the same view.

² See the theological part of the report. Sexuality is apparently not at the center of Marie-Dominique Philippe's doctrine, unlike Thomas Philippe. It is rather metaphysics, friendship, or finality.

³ Father Philippe's philosophy, being conceived as enlightening the entirety of reality, dispensed with the need to consider other approaches, which were viewed with condescension. A certain pretension of being the best community, the certainty of being above others, the belief that Father Philippe had understood certain things better than everyone else, all these elements favored abuses, preventing brothers and sisters from maintaining a healthy critical distance and being fully receptive to comments made by external people, including sometimes ecclesiastical authorities.

⁴ Several signs suggest that Father Philippe himself was under a form of ascendancy from Father Dehau, even after the latter's death (1956).

Just as the 2019 SOS Abuse commission report spoke of a 'system of abuse'¹, it might be appropriate to refer to a 'system of ascendancy', as ascendancy is a prerequisite for abuse, and it took on a systemic character within the Family of Saint John, with various forms of ascendancy mutually reinforcing each other. Sexual abuses were only one particularly serious manifestation of this ascendancy, which also resulted in spiritual abuses, abuses of conscience or power. Some of Father Philippe's teachings that are problematic relate directly to chastity, but those concerning ascendancy seem to be more numerous and more deeply rooted². One might wonder if the notion of ascendancy might not be more enlightening for characterizing what happened in the Family of Saint John than the notions of 'sectarian deviations' or 'mystico-sexual doctrine' which, whatever truth they may contain, could just be symptoms of ascendancy.

¹ The message of the 2022 General Chapter prefers to speak of a 'culture of abuse'.

² See the theological part of the report.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE HISTORICAL STUDY¹

At the end of this historical investigation, we would like to highlight some points that stand out more particularly, focusing on the question that was at the heart of the mission entrusted to our commission by the General Chapter of the Brothers of Saint John in 2019: the 'link between what the Eau Vive case reveals and the sexual abuses committed by the founder of the Family of Saint John and by some of its members'.

I. CENTRAL ROLE OF M.-D. PHILIPPE IN THE ABUSES COMMITTED IN THE COMMUNITY OF SAINT JOHN

The first conclusion we reached is that Father Marie-Dominique Philippe occupies a central place in the sexual abuses committed in the Family of Saint John, starting from the foundation of the community. Father M.-D. Philippe himself committed a significant number of sexual abuses, mainly on young women, often religious. Moreover, we now know that he had already committed sexual abuses before the foundation of the Community of Saint John, notably during his many apostolic trips to Paris or elsewhere. In retrospect, it is surprising that the authorities of the Dominican order, who could not have been completely ignorant of his involvement in the Eau Vive case, let him preach so freely in female religious communities, accompany so many women, and lead such an autonomous life.

A large part of the abuses committed by others than him, especially in the first 15 years of the Family of Saint John, were brought to his attention, often in spiritual accompaniment, but also as a superior. He approved some, turned a blind eye to others. It must be noted that, in the vast majority of cases, especially regarding relations between adults, he never considered these acts as abuses, probably because he could not or did not want to, not only because of the era but also because of his moral theology, spirituality, and his own practices. His inadequate reactions ensured that the victims were not listened to and were often even blamed. He clouded the consciences of everyone with his poor advice and unbalanced doctrine. Even though he might have offered guidance to assist a brother in self-correction, he never imposed any sanctions, including when incidents were brought to his attention by others while he served as the Prior General.

His role and responsibility in the abuses committed by others are not always the same; they can be more or less direct. When he intervened more directly, we sometimes observed deficient spiritual guidance, a lack of listening to victims, a lack of consideration for a brother's problems during the discernment for vows or ordination... In some cases, only his doctrinal and spiritual influence, and

¹ This part reports the conclusions of the historical study of *To Understand and to Heal*, pp. 477–490.

the absolute authority granted to him, are to blame. In other cases, his influence was exerted indirectly, through his disciples.

Under these circumstances, it's not surprising that a significant part of the sexual abuses committed by brothers (and a few sisters) shared traits with those committed by him: inappropriate positioning in spiritual guidance or religious authority, role confusion, ambiguity in certain gestures or words, justifications through friendship or a 'therapeutic' intention, etc. Often, the brothers who committed the abuses referred to Father M.-D. Philippe and invoked his authority (sometimes being more explicit than him in their justifications). There is also likely a factor of imitation: Father Philippe was seen as a model by many brothers, who tended to imitate him, and this certainly played a role in how some represented their role as spiritual guides or confessors, particularly in the affectionate, sensitive, or even sensual aspects of relationships, but also in the pretense of knowing God's will for a person.

However, some of the abuses committed by brothers do not resemble those committed by Father M.-D. Philippe himself. This is notably the case for criminal acts on minors under 15 years old committed by about ten brothers, which do not seem to have had characteristics specific to Saint John, but are similar to those that occurred elsewhere. Father Philippe's responsibility in these cases is rather indirect, in the discernment of vocations and governance that unfortunately put children at risk. He seems to have had some awareness of the abusive or at least abnormal nature of these acts and did not encourage or approve of them. The way he handled these cases relates more to his erroneous conception of religious or priestly vocation (which overrides all other considerations) and of mercy (which too often exempts from justice), rather than a doctrine about sexuality. His attitude in these cases was ultimately quite similar to what could be found elsewhere in the Church at the same time.

Our study also showed that this central role of Father M.-D. Philippe in sexual abuse was in fact just a manifestation of his central role in the life of the community, where he was omnipresent, as founder, principal teacher, spiritual mentor of many brothers and sisters (and laypeople), and Prior General of the brothers. Without a real counterbalance, he was, if not the sole, at least the primary reference in all areas.

His influence on the community was immense, and almost exclusive for some individuals who were completely under his control and lived only by him and for him. Generally, even though ascendancy is both difficult to measure and varies among individuals, it seems not exaggerated to speak of Father M.-D. Philippe's ascendancy over the entire Family of Saint John. Through his way of positioning himself as a teacher, priest, spiritual guide, or Prior General, he induced an ascendancy over individuals (who themselves might also have been seeking a reliable guide, a spiritual father, or a role model). Consciously or not, he expected and elicited signs of submission. His attitudes were imitated by brothers and sisters (spiritual mentors, teachers, superiors...), whose relationships were marked, in various ways and to different degrees, by positions that favored ascendancy. A largely unconscious 'culture of ascendancy' thus spread, supported by a distorted conception of spiritual life and religious life, which did not sufficiently appeal to individual conscience and direct relationship with God.

Emphasizing the issue of ascendancy does not mean that chastity is unimportant. Through his ambiguous teaching on friendship, Father Philippe fostered relationships that were not necessarily abusive but were contrary to the vow of chastity and could lead to abuse.

Father Philippe's influence led to the spread of harmful habits and misguided principles, amid many other entirely conventional and traditional things that provided reassurance, and to some extent, masked the flaws, along with a certain renewal in expression, which was appealing. This ascendancy, by partially distorting consciences, made it more difficult to respond to sexual abuses and delayed awareness. In many aspects, Father M.-D. Philippe's influence was decisive. His central role in the abuses committed in the Family of Saint John does not exonerate other abusers of their own responsibility, but it sheds light on the systemic and communal dimensions of the problem of sexual abuse and ascendancy in the Community of Saint John. Moreover, recognizing Father Philippe's

central role in the abuses committed in the Community of Saint John does not mean that he was the origin of all these deviations. The study of the Eau Vive case helped us to better understand this.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TWO 'CASES'

Our study could only confirm the correspondences between the Eau Vive case and what happened in the Family of Saint John. At first glance, an obvious link is established in the person of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe himself, who was closely involved in both cases. Furthermore, in both instances, the cases involved sexual abuse within Catholic communities. The authority of the abusers and their intellectual and spiritual justifications seem to have played a significant role in these sexual abuses.

However, it's important to try to specify the exact nature of the link between what happened in the 1950s and what occurred in the Community of Saint John, which implies highlighting both similarities and differences, as these two cases, separated by about thirty years¹, while quite similar, do not have exactly the same characteristics. The fact that Fathers Thomas and Marie-Dominique are blood brothers and Dominicans doesn't mean they think and act in the same way.

The similarities are obviously what strike first, especially considering the most frequent type of sexual abuse in the Family of Saint John: that of a priest, often a spiritual guide, towards an adult woman whom he persuades of the legitimacy of the acts committed. Regardless of their state of life (religious, former religious, laywomen, or young women seeking their vocation), the victims are in both cases predominantly women with strong spiritual aspirations.

In both cases, these abuses take place in a setting of formation in the 'three wisdoms', with a strong contemplative dimension, headed by one of the Philippe brothers, and the vast majority of people living there are unaware of the existence of sexual abuses, which concern a minority. In both cases, this institution met the aspirations of a part of the Church and managed to obtain official recognition and support within the Catholic hierarchy and from personalities, based on an image of doctrinal safety and spiritual depth, at times of questioning. And in both situations, there is a comparable phenomenon of idealization and veneration of one of the two brothers, leading to an ascendancy over individuals. Sexual abuses are one of the expressions of this broader ascendancy. Certain individuals are more susceptible to this ascendancy and contribute to spreading it among others, convinced that they have received a 'great grace' and are partaking in a mystery inaccessible to most people. Even after interventions by the hierarchy, some individuals, including victims of sexual abuse, persist in this belief.

In some instances, sexual acts are introduced gradually, beginning with merely affectionate gestures and advancing to genuinely sexual acts, while avoiding those that could lead to procreation². They are often accompanied by intellectual justifications that lead to a transcendence of common morality in the name of mysticism or friendship. The authority of the spiritual guide plays a significant role. Spiritual guidance is perverted and takes the form of ascendancy, where the guide claims to know God's will for the person better than the person themselves. This sacralization of the spiritual father, linked to a fusion conception of paternity, leads to the multiplication of spiritual abuses and abuses of conscience, but also sexual abuses, on individuals seeking spiritual guidance.

This situation can be worsened when the victim turns to the spiritual guidance of a third party who, far from dissuading her, further deepens her dependence on her abuser, confirming erroneous doctrines, maintaining confusion in the person's mind, particularly regarding common moral standards, by refusing to judge acts that are objectively serious. This type of complicity particularly concerns Father Marie-Dominique Philippe in both cases.

¹ If we take the foundation dates of Eau Vive (1945) and Saint John (1975) as reference points.

² This theoretical limit, however, was crossed in a few exceptional cases. We think here of Anne de Rosanbo's abortion, but also of a few cases involving the Brothers of Saint John.

30 or 40 years apart, we also find similar attitudes in the relationship to the hierarchy: distrust of the institution, self-referential thinking, external protests of obedience but total autonomy in actions, skill in maneuvering among different authorities¹, prescribing secrecy, lies, etc. Even in the way the two Philippe brothers behave as founders at the head of a community, some resemblances are striking, notably their emotional governance, lacking in organization and caution, but also their ability to elicit both enthusiasm and adherence, and on the other hand, mistrust and rejection.

However, these similarities should not obscure the fact that there are also numerous differences between these two cases. The main difference is undoubtedly that the central figure of the Eau Vive case is Father Thomas Philippe, while his brother, Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, plays the leading role in the abuses committed in the Community of Saint John. Moreover, Eau Vive is a home primarily hosting lay students, whereas the Family of Saint John consists mainly of three religious institutes. At the institutional level, therefore, there is a significant difference, and Father Thomas's authority over the students of Eau Vive is much less than that of Father Marie-Dominique over the members of the Family of Saint John, especially the brothers for whom he is the superior. It should be noted, however, that what is called 'the Eau Vive case' actually involves not only the student home, but also Dominican and Carmelite religious communities, of which the majority of the victims were members². But even over these religious women, Father Thomas Philippe did not have external authority, nor the authority a founder might have.

Another difference is that Eau Vive could not survive long after the departure of its founder, especially since his successor, Jean Vanier, was suspected of participating in the same deviations. This is not the case with Saint John, where the community survived the disappearance of Father M.-D. Philippe.

Considering the sexual abuses themselves, another major difference is that in the first case, only Father Thomas was recognized as guilty of sexual abuse³, even though individuals considered as accomplices were also sanctioned, while in the case of the Family of Saint John, the number of individuals recognized as guilty of sexual abuse is several dozen⁴. In Saint John, the abuses spanned about forty years, while Eau Vive lasted only about a decade (of which six under the direction of Father Thomas). The abuses committed at Eau Vive were denounced much more quickly, while in the Family of Saint John, it took about thirty years and the death of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe for the accusations against him to be taken seriously⁵ and for procedures to be initiated against brothers.

Significant differences also exist in terms of the victims. There are no minor victims in the Eau Vive case, while in Saint John there are about fifty⁶. Among adult victims, the victims of the Eau Vive case are women (though one might wonder to what extent Jean Vanier was also a victim), whereas in the Family of Saint John there are also male victims, although women are in the majority⁷.

¹ The two Philippe brothers tended to seek Roman protection, bypassing local authorities (bishops and Dominican superiors). Eau Vive was dependent on the Master General of the Dominicans. In the Community of Saint John, support from the Holy See reassured internally and lent legitimacy.

² The institutional stakes represented by the control of Eau Vive for the Dominicans and the difficulties this caused for several years for the Dominican province of France probably explain in part why this term 'Eau Vive case' became established. It also had the advantage of drawing attention to Eau Vive, i.e. the work, and diverting it from its founder and, most importantly, from the Order and the convents where abuses had been committed.

³ Father Dehau admitted to having engaged in sexual acts with religious sisters, but he did not face a trial due to his old age, and he died shortly after receiving a canonical admonition.

⁴ As of April 2023, 23 brothers have been convicted following Church and/or State procedures. Others have been subject to disciplinary sanctions. Procedures are still ongoing as of April 2023.

⁵ It is worth questioning whether being a religious institute made it more difficult for the Community of Saint John to become aware of and denounce the abuses. The fact that Father Philippe was the superior prevented the victims of brothers from being taken into account. Moreover, he often combined this external authority with an internal authority in spiritual guidance. Religious victims seem less likely to report abuses in both cases. It was laypeople who spoke out first, even though some were former religious sisters. This suggests that religious life delayed both the awareness and denunciation of the facts.

⁶ 45 minor victims have been identified, involving 21 brothers.

⁷ There are 27 adult male victims, of whom 20 are brothers. Additionally, a few abuses were also committed by women against other women.

Regarding the justifications used and the doctrine linked to sexual abuse, despite commonalities and a fundamental convergence, there are also differences. In Eau Vive, they are more theological, involving an incestuous vision of the relationship between Jesus and Mary and an explicit glorification of sexual organs, while in the Community of Saint John, justifications are more philosophical, with a reference to 'love of friendship', even if the theological aspect is not excluded. In both cases, a publicly orthodox doctrine can be understood in a heterodox manner by initiated individuals who see a hidden meaning. In Father Thomas Philippe's teaching, there seems to be a clear distinction between a public doctrine, maintaining the appearance of Catholic faith despite some excesses, and a hidden doctrine, which goes further (explicitly sexual and clearly diverging from the faith by sexualizing the relationship between Jesus and Mary). For Father Marie-Dominique, it's slightly different: everything about sexuality is more ambiguous; even in spiritual guidance, he often remains vague and relies on suggestion and confusion; however, many aspects of his teaching, at different levels, foster both a sensual conception of relationships (particularly through his discourse on friendship) and above all, ascendancy, which is probably more central to him than sexuality¹. It can be wondered if the Eau Vive case led M.-D. Philippe to be less explicit in his justifications than his brother and to develop an ambiguous discourse on 'love of friendship', which attracted less attention than Father Thomas Philippe's mystico-sexual delusions.

It is also noticeable that Father Thomas seemed to have a greater desire to spread his doctrine on sexuality, while Father Marie-Dominique sought to make disciples primarily at the level of his philosophy or theology. The concept of love of friendship played a significant role in his teaching, but it was not a discourse explicitly centered on sexuality.

A more delicate question is the formation of a sectarian group or a 'mystical sect.'. As we understand, both brothers inspired strong adherence to their persons and doctrines. In both cases, devoted disciples propagated not only their doctrines but also their sexual practices. Nonetheless, there seem to be notable differences in this aspect too. In this area, matters appear more defined around Father Thomas, and more vague around Father Marie-Dominique. Father Thomas's disciples seem to have had more 'horizontal' communication among themselves, whereas in Father Marie-Dominique's case, privileged relationships are more 'vertical', one-on-one, in guidance.

At Eau Vive, Father Thomas Philippe established a true system of conscious and active complicity, involving several of his victims, which allowed him to discreetly receive women in his room. These individuals, deeply embedded in his mystico-sexual delirium, consciously protected him. Victims who testified about Father Thomas's practices in the 1950s report clear justifications, and some of them demonstrate an awareness of belonging to a group². In adversity, a tightly-knit clandestine group formed around Father Thomas, developing a system of coded correspondence, with abundant letters among different individuals, sometimes quite explicit about the sexual content³. All this makes the term 'sect' spontaneously come to mind.

In the Family of Saint John, complicity was also observed (notably that of Alix Parmentier), and in a few isolated cases an awareness of belonging to a certain 'elite' of initiates. Yet, there isn't such a strong 'group consciousness' with horizontal communications. Based on available evidence, most perpetrators of abuse would probably be surprised to be considered members of any 'mystico-sexual' group linked to Father Philippe's teaching. The collective aspect of sexual delusion appears less clear, which is likely related to the less explicit nature and less focus on sexuality in Father Marie-Dominique's doctrine. While Father Thomas did not hesitate to give lengthy explanatory developments, Father Marie-Dominique's explanations, when they existed, were shorter and more ambiguous, similar to his letters, which contained nothing compromising despite their very affectionate tone. Father Marie-Dominique Philippe's victims sometimes questioned the meaning of

¹ For problematic aspects of Father M.-D. Philippe's doctrine, see the theological part of this report.

² Antoine Mourges talks about 'the existence of a form of collective consciousness of these "graces"'. The women of the group share with each other on this subject; the older ones encourage the younger ones to continue. ' (N. JEAMMET, B. GRANGER, A. MOURGES, F. MICHEL, C. VINCENT-MORY, G. RIMBAUT, *Emprise et Abus, enquête sur Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier et L'Arche [Ascendancy and Abuse, Investigation on Thomas Philippe, Jean Vanier and L'Arche]*, Châteauneuf-sur-Charente, Frémur, 2023, p. 251).

³ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 210-220.

his gestures. To a victim who spoke to him about what had happened the previous evening, he could ask, seemingly surprised: 'What did I do?' This vague, elusive, and implicit aspect was less conducive to the formation of a group, a 'mystico-sexual sect', but it probably facilitated the spread of sexual abuses and the great diversity of forms they took. Similarly, the longer duration of the Community of Saint John allowed for a greater spread of abuses than at Eau Vive. The stronger institutional dimension in the Community of Saint John, due to the religious life, paradoxically might have favored 'sectarian drifts' and control.

III. NATURE OF THE LINK BETWEEN THE TWO CASES (ORIGIN, REASON FOR THESE COMMONALITIES)

It is clear that the similarities between the two cases are not coincidental. However, the differences suggest that the second is not simply a continuation of the first in slightly different forms, as one might say about what happened at L'Arche around Father Thomas, Jean Vanier, and the 'little ones' group, where the same people continued their shared story that began at Eau Vive¹.

Direct testimony and some indirect ones allow us to say that Father Marie-Dominique himself committed sexual abuses before the foundation of Saint John and as early as the 1950s, but he kept a certain distance from his brother², at least after the Eau Vive incident³. Except for one case, his victims did not really approach Father Thomas⁴. In fact, if he was suspected in the 1950s without being exposed, it could be because the people he was guiding (and whom he might have abused) were kept at a distance from Father Thomas, both physically and spiritually. Investigators thus had no direct testimony about Father Marie-Dominique's morals. If this hypothesis is true, it suggests seeing the Eau Vive and Saint John cases as specific developments within two almost parallel stories around the two brothers, rather than two successive cases separated by about thirty years.

The hypothesis of a decisive influence of Father Thomas on Father Marie-Dominique regarding sexual abuses has not been verified. Actually, the primary influence on Father Marie-Dominique Philippe was not his brother, but his uncle, Father Dehau, who inspired both nephews⁵. If there are similarities between the behaviors of the two brothers and between the two cases, it might not be primarily attributable to the influence of the elder on the younger, but rather to a common influence from Father Dehau. Father Marie-Dominique never referred to his brother, although he seemed to love him very much. He did not recommend reading his spiritual works. On the contrary, he often referred to Father Dehau, advising the reading of his books and the transcriptions of Father Dehau's sermons. Some brothers and sisters of Saint John indeed found spiritual nourishment in Father Dehau's writings⁶. The investigation into Eau Vive showed that Father Dehau had admitted to having sexual acts with nuns, and he had approved Thomas Philippe's actions⁷. Could he have also approved similar, albeit perhaps less delirious, deviations by his nephew Marie-Dominique?

¹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 273–283.

² Conversely, his integration into the group close to Father Thomas was real, but not complete. See *ibid.* pp. 342–351.

³ The brothers and sisters of Saint John remember that he did not hesitate to criticize Father Thomas on a doctrinal level. Father Thomas, moreover, never taught at Saint John, even though he was welcomed at Saint-Jodard at the end of his life.

⁴ The only victim that Father Marie-Dominique Philippe sent to his brother to alleviate her doubts about the legitimacy of what he was doing was Michèle-France Pesneau in 1975 (*L'Emprise [The Ascendancy]*, p. 85). He did not do this for any victim of the Family of Saint John.

⁵ In '*Les trois sagesse*,' M.-D. Philippe attributes his entry into the Dominicans to the influence of his uncle, not his brother: 'It was not Father Thomas who influenced me at all; it was Father Dehau' (Paris, Fayard, 1994, p. 199). Comparing their respective influences on his life, he adds: 'that of Father Dehau was much deeper' (p. 200).

⁶ 'However, quite a few brothers and sisters feed on Father Dehau for spiritual reading.' (Minutes of the family council of September 30, 2004, GACSJ). At the same meeting, however, it was decided to limit the internal distribution of Father Dehau's writings, for reasons related to the discrepancy of these sermons with contemporary mentalities: 'a judgment of appropriateness should be made beforehand, as some things can be awkward in the current context. An initial sorting will be done by the apostolic sisters who will submit it to the brothers and contemplative sisters.'

⁷ This is at least what emerges from the reading of the report of archives from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, but it must be noted that this knowledge of Father Dehau's acts and responsibility is based on only a small number of

In this hypothesis, the sexual abuses committed by Father Marie-Dominique would depend more on the influence of Father Dehau than on that of Father Thomas, which could be a factor explaining the differences between the two brothers, especially in terms of doctrine. It might even be possible that Father Marie-Dominique was more faithful than Father Thomas to Father Dehau's direction¹. Therefore, what happened at Saint John would not be a direct consequence or continuation of the Eau Vive case, but another development of Father Dehau's doctrine and guidance. The two cases would be two branches of the same story tracing back to Father Dehau.

In Father Philippe's conception of the Community of Saint John, there is no doubt that Father Pierre-Thomas Dehau had a place, even if he was quite discreet about it. An anecdote illustrates this: while receiving a young novice in his office, he pointed to a portrait of Father Dehau and said, 'he's the grandfather.' For him, the lineage from Father Dehau was clear: he saw himself as his successor, and the Community of Saint John as a fruit of Father Dehau's preaching and prayer. This is probably why, when the Dominican sisters had to leave the monastery of Bouvines, Father M.-D. Philippe wanted Saint John sisters to settle there. During a family council on June 10, 2004, he discussed this project, which was clearly dear to him, as reflected in the meeting minutes:

'[...] Since the apostolic sisters couldn't commit that year, Father Marie-Dominique Philippe asked Sister Alix if the contemplative sisters could found a community in Bouvines (the site of Father Dehau's grave and the parents of the father). He himself dictated to Sister Alix a letter addressed to the Félix Dehau Association, in charge of managing the monastery, stating that he did not understand why he had not been consulted during the departure of the Dominican sisters, both as a family member and as the founder of the Congregation. Currently, it's the Community of Chemin Neuf that inhabits the monastery. In this letter, he also said that the contemplative sisters are ready to go there. The father's intention regarding this place is that there is a spiritual heritage there that should not be squandered; it's something that is in his heart beyond the family link².

The spiritual heritage Father Philippe is thinking of is certainly that of Father P.-Th. Dehau, who had been the chaplain of the Bouvines monastery and had ended his days there. Similarly, in founding the *studium* of the Brothers of Saint John, it was seen that he had in mind the Dominican Saulchoir *studium*, but an idealized Saulchoir aligned with Father Dehau's thoughts on theological wisdom, i.e. a Saulchoir oriented towards a speculative and contemplative Thomism, a 'monastic theology school', as opposed to university theology.

If this hypothesis is accurate, the sexual abuses committed in the Family of Saint John are more in line with the 'mysterious things' Father Dehau admitted to practicing with nuns rather than a direct continuity with the sexual abuses committed by Father Thomas Philippe in the Eau Vive case. However, unlike Father Dehau, who was a preacher (occasional or regular) in religious communities without authority over them³, Marie-Dominique in the Family of Saint John had real authority as a founder and exerted control over the entire community, which limited the sisters' ability to realize and resist the abuses.

If the spiritual direction exercised by Father Dehau had a more decisive influence on Father Marie-Dominique than the practices and theological justifications of Father Thomas, it is not surprising that the most delirious aspects of Father Thomas Philippe's mystico-sexual elaboration are not found in

testimonies. It is hoped that researchers will have access to the original documents of the procedure, as well as to the archives of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life. The file of the investigation conducted by Father Marie-Eugène de l'Enfant-Jésus in the Carmels could undoubtedly bring new elements. On Father Dehau's involvement, see T. CAVALIN, *L'Affaire. Les dominicains face au scandale des frères Philippe [The case. The Dominicans Up Against the Scandal of the Philippe Brothers]*, Paris, Cerf, 2023, pp. 468–470.

¹ In this hypothesis, the more implicit, vague, and less focused on sexuality aspect of Father Marie-Dominique's doctrine could more closely reflect Father Dehau's doctrine. Therefore, it should not be interpreted primarily as a concealment to avoid further canonical troubles.

² GACSJ. Despite Father M.-D. Philippe's denial, his intervention at this council only confirms T. Cavalin's interpretation of the 'familial model' at work in the way Father Philippe represents the Community of Saint John, which can be considered as 'the realization of a new "home"' (see T. CAVALIN, *L'Affaire. Les dominicains face au scandale des frères Philippe [The case. The Dominicans Up Against the Scandal of the Philippe Brothers]*, Paris, Cerf, 2023, p. 696).

³ It should be noted that it was Father Thomas Philippe's abuses that revealed those of Father Dehau, who was apparently more discreet. We have not found evidence that Father Dehau caused the same turmoil in communities as his nephews did.

the Family of Saint John. The similarities between the abuses committed by the two brothers could stem from a common origin in Father Dehau's direction, each brother interpreting it in his own way, while the more 'prudent' and implicit justifications of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe could be explained by his favored reference to Father Dehau. Conversely, the imbalances in his thought should also be more closely linked to those of Father P.-Th. Dehau's thought, which would require an in-depth study. Father Dehau's direction would suffice to explain Father Marie-Dominique's complicity regarding his brother's actions observed in the Eau Vive case, without needing to invoke the influence of one brother over the other.

On the other hand, if we consider that the sexual abuses committed by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe and by many of the Brothers of Saint John who committed abuses are primarily linked to an ascendancy exercised especially in spiritual guidance, one cannot help but question Father Philippe's own experience with his uncle. Did the way Father Dehau mentored him not constitute a form of ascendancy? If so, was this ascendancy decisive in his own way of conceiving and living his relationship with God and others? Here again, a study of Father Dehau's spiritual doctrine would seem enlightening, but it would probably also be necessary to delve into other data – archives, correspondence, memories, etc. – that could help to better understand how the relationship between P.-Th. Dehau and M.-D. Philippe marked the latter.

Father Dehau's ascendancy seems the best explanation for Father Marie-Dominique's attitude during his canonical trial. It is indeed quite surprising that he did not question himself more in the face of the hierarchy's warnings. On the contrary, it appears that he instead drew from this affair the conviction that he needed to further conceal his practices and, at least outwardly, distance himself from his brother. Isn't this a sign of his inability to question Father Dehau's authority and to consider that he could have been mistaken¹? Father Marie-Dominique behaved as if he believed himself to be the keeper of a superior doctrine, one that the Church could not understand, and which deserved to be upheld despite the disapproval of his superiors and the hierarchy. The importance he placed on the authority of the spiritual father could be linked to this painful experience where he found himself forced to choose between his spiritual father and obedience to the Church. This situation could also partly explain his attitude towards private revelations, or the importance he placed on his relationship with John Paul II: knowing well that he was straying from the morality taught by the Catholic Church, he tended to seek signs of divine approval, confirmations that he was on the right path despite all the warnings.

To answer the question posed by the General Chapter to our commission, there is indeed a link between what happened in the 1950s at Eau Vive and what happened in the Family of Saint John, but this link seems more complex than a simple continuity, as if Saint John had naturally succeeded Eau Vive. The connection between the two cases is not one of causality, as if one were the origin of the other, and certainly not an inevitable connection, as if the first were destined to lead to the second. In some respects, it truly is the same 'case', but this assumes the inclusion of Father Dehau, as Tangi Cavalin incorporates. In reality, the Eau Vive case has a 'prehistory' in Father Dehau's actions with nuns, and it is perhaps this common prehistory that explains the similarities between the Eau Vive case and the sexual abuses committed in the Family of Saint John. However, it is certain that the Eau Vive case, and the condemnation he received, constituted a painful experience for Father Marie-Dominique, about which he rarely spoke afterwards. This episode could only have reinforced his mistrust and the concealment of his sexual practices, and certainly also influenced the way he handled accusations of sexual abuse against Brothers of Saint John.

¹ 'Poor P. Marie-Dominique is mad with grief. [...] The idea that Father Dehau could have been mistaken about the course to follow seems impossible, inadmissible...' (Cf. JOURNET Charles – MARITAIN Jacques, *Correspondence*, op. cit., pp. 204–205). Although it is not explicitly stated that Father Dehau's error concerns his spiritual direction towards Thomas Philippe, this quote from Maritain shows that Marie-Dominique's problem, what affects and troubles him, is not that Father Thomas was mistaken and fell, but the idea that Father Dehau could have been mistaken. This attitude is also found among his own disciples, some of whom are unable to entertain the possibility that Father Marie-Dominique Philippe could have been mistaken.

The discovery of the Eau Vive case certainly demonstrates that what happened in the Family of Saint John, in terms of sexual abuse and deviations concerning chastity or practices of control, has deep roots, which cannot be attributed only to the youthful errors of an inexperienced community, nor even to the sole influence of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe. He was in fact long entangled in a history that exceeded him and from which he was apparently not entirely free. A part of this history, the oldest, concerning Father Dehau, is still poorly known and may remain so.

IV. THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF THE CHURCH

Our study also revealed limitations in the Church's accompaniment of the Community of Saint John. From the very beginning, the Abbot of Lérins and subsequently the bishops of Autun did not fail to highlight deficiencies and provide areas of focus to the community, sometimes vigorously, as exemplified by Bishop Séguy's admonition in June 2000. The Holy See was kept informed. Initially, the authorities were not concerned about sexual abuses, since they were unaware of them, but they requested efforts in discerning vocations, in spiritual and pastoral formation, in ecclesial communion, etc. They were also concerned about the too significant role of Father Philippe in the community of brothers and in the Family of Saint John. These concerns led to the 1996 decision of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life to demand the resignation of Father M.-D. Philippe from his position as Prior General. This decision, however, was not implemented, due to Bishop Séguy's reluctance towards a measure he considered harsh and humiliating, and the change in direction of the dicastery, following a meeting of the brothers of the Prior General's council, and perhaps also an intervention by Archbishop Dziwisz on behalf of Pope John Paul II. Internally, while trying to take into account the criticisms made of them, the brothers did not always see their validity and importance, and Father M.-D. Philippe, who was still the Prior General, hindered any process of awareness. Subsequently, the warnings of Bishop Séguy seem not to have been taken seriously enough by the dicastery, which accepted the re-election of Father M.-D. Philippe in 1998, presumably considering that the evident good will of the brothers, and some changes in the community's functioning, were sufficient guarantees against deviations.

Thus, the relative lucidity of the authorities struggled to translate into concrete measures. The only area where the Roman authorities were firm during the lifetime of Father M.-D. Philippe (but late) concerned his teaching, which the Congregation for Catholic Education refused, from 2003 onwards, to count in the *ratio studiorum* for priestly ordination. This intervention was certainly beneficial, as it forced the brothers, despite their resistance, to train other teachers and to make more use of external contributors. However, this attitude of the authority, which most of the brothers did not understand the validity of (the main criterion invoked was the age of Father M.-D. Philippe), did not immediately change Father Philippe's intellectual ascendancy over the community. In this sense, it was not decisive.

From the moment sexual abuses were known, those of a few brothers, but especially those of Father M.-D. Philippe (and Sister Alix Parmentier), the Church authorities became more attentive and demanding. They began to suspect Father Philippe's teaching on morality, particularly the concept of love of friendship. However, it was the Brothers of Saint John themselves who chose, without being compelled by the hierarchy, to reveal their founder's sexual abuses in 2013. Bishops and the Holy See encouraged and supported this process but left the responsibility to the brothers. At the doctrinal level also, the examination of Father M.-D. Philippe's thought was largely left to the assessment of the Brothers and Sisters of Saint John: the Holy See pointed out certain deficiencies, but only in a general manner, without delving into the problematic details. The brothers also set up the Commission SOS Abuse, which allowed many victims of sexual abuse to be heard. Canonical and state procedures were initiated, leading to sanctions, sometimes including dismissal from the clerical state and the community. Gradually, an awareness of the magnitude of the problem of sexual abuses and other forms of abuse occurred in the Family of Saint John, and the issue of control eventually emerged as central. The accompaniment of the hierarchy contributed to this awareness, notably through the mandates entrusted to Bishop Bonfils, Bishop Brincard, and Bishop Blondel. General chapters of the three religious institutes (brothers, apostolic sisters, and contemplative sisters)

distanced themselves from Father M.-D. Philippe and received assistance in this from the Holy See, particularly from Archbishop Carballo, secretary of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life, who clearly stated from 2019 that Father Philippe could not be considered a 'charismatic reference'.

It is surprising how long it took for the Church authorities to intervene (about thirty years¹). The only notable exceptions where the authorities acted in a constraining manner are the intervention of the Congregation for Catholic Education in 2003², and that of Cardinal Barbarin in 2009³, which later led to the appointment of a pontifical commissioner for the contemplative sisters. In both cases, it was not the issue of sexual abuses that was at stake, but rather the problem of control. The discrepancy between the extent of the problems as we perceive them today and the slowness of awareness seems to be explained by several factors.

- 1) The first factor is undoubtedly the good reputation of Father M.-D. Philippe and the credit he enjoyed in a large part of the Church, including in the hierarchy, and even at its summit. Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Martinez Somalo, Bishop Séguy, Bishop Madec, and many others held him in high esteem. This was primarily based on his reputation as a teacher, who was perceived as a fairly classical Thomist but open-minded, capable of dialoguing with modern thought and accepting the reforms of Vatican II. But what must have particularly impressed the hierarchy was the foundation of the community itself and its ability to attract young people to consecrated life at a time when it was marked by departures and an identity crisis. In the criticisms addressed to Father M.-D. Philippe by associations like AVREF or by the press, the authorities tended to see an instrumentalization for ideological purposes of the youth problems of the Community of Saint John. This interpretation certainly weighed in favor of downplaying the difficulties: it certainly seemed inappropriate to hinder, for reasons that were ultimately difficult to discern and that perhaps concerned only a few people, the development of a community that was attracting vocations and showing great apostolic zeal, from which the Church benefited⁴. The relative protection that Father M.-D. Philippe and his community enjoyed from Pope John Paul II and the Roman curia is probably primarily explained in this way.
- 2) The leniency of the dicastery responsible for consecrated life also undoubtedly stems from the desire to welcome and protect the charisms of new communities as gifts from God to the Church, which involves accepting that they do not entirely fit into the traditional forms of consecrated life. However, admiration for the dynamism of a foundation and the desire to respect the freedom of the Holy Spirit may have sometimes paralyzed the necessary discernment of authority. The idealization of the founder, seen as the bearer of the charism, did not occur only internally, but also, apparently, at the level of ecclesiastical authority.
- 3) The third reason that may partly explain a delay in the hierarchy's intervention is the difficulty in objectifying the issue of control. One cannot claim that this entirely eluded the attention of the authorities. On the contrary, it raised concerns from the beginning, with Dom Bernard de Terris, Abbot of Lérins in charge of the community during its early years, and then with Bishop Raymond Séguy, Bishop of Autun. It was also present in the accusations of 'sectarian drifts' faced by Father Philippe and Saint John in the media by associations like AVREF, or in the investigation by the Service Accueil Médiation in 2002. However, it is particularly difficult to get those under control to admit that their freedom is not fully respected. All the examples

If we consider the appointment of Bishop Madec as the religious assistant for the brothers at the end of 2002 and Bishop Poulain as the religious assistant for the contemplative sisters in 2003 as a starting point, it's 27 years; if we take the appointment of Bishop Brincard as the pontifical commissioner for the contemplative sisters and religious assistant for the brothers and apostolic sisters in February 2011, it's 35 years.

²This Roman Congregation, responsible for studies in seminaries, then requested that Father M.-D. Philippe no longer be a regular professor: the courses he taught had to be entrusted to others to be validated in the context of priestly formation.

³ Noting that his requests to the community of contemplative sisters were not being taken into account by the responsible sisters, Cardinal Barbarin decided in May 2009 to appoint a new Prior Generaless in place of Sister Alix.

⁴ On the temptation to forgo discernment by just noting the 'good fruits' borne by a community, see the document of the post-CIASE CORREF working group titled '*Bon arbre – bons fruits*' [*Good Tree – Good Fruits*] in reference to Mt 7, 15–23. <https://www.viereligieuse.fr/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/6.-Groupe-Bon-arbre-bons-fruits-1.pdf>

used to illustrate this problem appear internally as particular cases blown out of proportion and that cannot be generalized, or as principles of petition¹. From the authorities' side, the fear of being wrong and of too harshly sanctioning youthful faults can be paralyzing. Especially, there can be hesitation about how to intervene. When Cardinal Philippe Barbarin did so regarding the contemplative sisters in 2009, it caused great misunderstandings and deep wounds, without necessarily ending the control for many sisters. In the case of Father M.-D. Philippe, it was perhaps even more complicated as he gave the appearance of being greatly detached from power, since the submission he expected was primarily intellectual and spiritual. A Bishop, Bishop Joseph Madec, was present on the council for six years without identifying any major issues.

- 4) The poor understanding of sexual abuse, apparently at all levels of the Church (and probably more broadly), can be seen as a fourth reason for the hierarchy's lack of intervention with respect to the Community of Saint John. It had serious consequences for some people. The reluctance to report to judicial authorities, or to open canonical investigations, the focus on the abuser (whose conversion is sought) rather than on the victim, were not unique to Father M.-D. Philippe and the Community of Saint John, but seem to have been quite widely shared, particularly by some bishops, until the early 2010s². It was only from the point when canonical investigations of the Brothers of Saint John took place that the systemic nature of the sexual abuse problem and Father M.-D. Philippe's responsibility were revealed.
- 5) Additionally, Father Philippe's cleverness and deceit serve as a fifth reason. On one hand, he knew how to suppress complaints from sexual abuse victims and discredit the few who testified; he also muddled consciences by downplaying all problems related to chastity in general, and by guilt-tripping those who desired more justice. On the other hand, whether conscious or not, his ability to assure of his intention to obey without changing anything in practice, and to subtly pit different levels of authority against each other to exploit the gaps, thwarted all attempts to control him. His subtle way of internally instilling a relativization of the hierarchy, with a mix of condescending remarks towards bishops and affective protests of submission, had consequences on the brothers' and sisters' ability to accept corrections and the way they cooperated with authorities: a preference for higher, more distant authority over the closer and often more perceptive one; a tendency for an enmeshed relationship with bishops who love us (and let us act freely), but distrust towards those who do not. When authority does not fully approve and is demanding, it's because they haven't understood us well; some concluded that we are then not obliged to obey, as shown by the crisis of the contemplative sisters.
- 6) Finally, it's surprising that no one³ among those who knew about the Eau Vive case, even in broad strokes, thought it worth mentioning at the time of the foundation of the Community of Saint John, especially during the founding of the sisters' communities, at least as a point of attention. Even after the first scandals, it seems that no one dared to make the connection openly, as if bringing to mind this old pre-Vatican II story would have been a sin against the

¹ 'This respect for the established forms of the Church's governance, however, reaches its limits: faced with a system like the one established at Saint John by Marie-Dominique Philippe, that is, of perfect orthodoxy on the surface, only occasional or individual errors, always capable of being corrected, are identifiable. The misdeeds are those of individuals whose psychological fragility is alleged. The flaws in the governance structures can always be corrected through an appeal to the Church's expertise in the field of consecrated life. The person and the charisma of the founder, however, are beyond any criticism audible to the institution. To the limit, the community's faults argue in its favor: they reflect its youth and the extreme mercy of its leader, guilty only of refusing no one and not wanting to judge those he takes under his protection. The complaints that have multiplied over the years and that have found expression in the fight against "sectarian deviations" fail to diminish the symbolic credit of the founder, even after his death'. (T. CAVALIN, *L'Affaire. Les dominicains face au scandale des frères Philippe [The case. The Dominicans Up Against the Scandal of the Philippe Brothers]*, Paris, Cerf, 2023, pp. 133–134)

² CIASE notes a change from the 2000s, and especially from 2010. Voir *Les violences sexuelles dans l'Église catholique. France 1950-2020. Rapport de la Commission indépendante sur les abus sexuels dans l'Église* [Sexual Violence in the Catholic Church. France. 1950-2020. Report of the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church], pp. 276–286.

³ At least as far as can be judged from the available documentation. The opening of the archives of the dicasteries or of the Secretariat of State may eventually correct this point.

Spirit: the new community had to be given every chance without being viewed through old prejudices. Yet, for those inside, knowing about this case could have been enlightening. The well-kept secret about Eau Vive and especially the condemnation of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe certainly slowed both the hierarchy's interventions and the awareness.

V. BREAKING FREE FROM ASCENDANCY

Around 2010, awareness began to grow that a fundamental problem was undermining the community, due to the initial accusations against some Brothers of Saint John, including those close to Father Philippe, and the severe crisis of the contemplative sisters, revealed by Cardinal Barbarin's decisions in June 2009. At that time, rumors started circulating about 'files' concerning the morals of Father Philippe and Sister Alix in Rome. There was also concern about a possible link between some cases of sexual abuse and Father M.-D. Philippe's teaching on the love of friendship. Attention was then focused on the issue of chastity, which the brothers' community started addressing from 2011, but powerful mechanisms of denial were also at play, hindering this effort.

However, the revelation in 2013 of sexual abuses committed by Father M.-D. Philippe himself marked a real turning point, allowing for a more comprehensive questioning: the sexual abuses were not just the actions of a few isolated brothers who had misinterpreted Father Philippe's teachings or spiritual advice, but rather raised the question of how his own abuses had influenced his doctrine and way of life, and consequently the Family of Saint John. This journey was not without difficulties. It took time to admit the unthinkable. Initially, the questioning, particularly in doctrinal terms, was limited only to matters strictly related to chastity, friendship, and sexuality. It did not seem necessary to go further, at the risk of destabilizing the community. However, gradually, with the revelation of more and more abuses linked to spiritual guidance, the issues of ascendancy over individuals and Father Philippe's spiritual doctrine began to emerge. The ARTE documentary in March 2019 opened many eyes, especially among the apostolic and contemplative Sisters of Saint John, to the severity of the sexual abuses committed by Father Philippe. This led to a distancing of the three religious institutes of the Family of Saint John from their founder, as expressed by their last General Chapters (2019, 2021, and 2022).

This journey, marked by feelings of betrayal, anger, denial, departures of brothers and sisters, but also by awareness, acknowledgment of sexual abuses, reforms, and new cooperations with external parties, is not yet complete in 2023. Trials have taken place, and sanctions have been imposed. Steps have been taken regarding victims of sexual abuse, or other types of abuse. Others are ongoing.

The identity of the Family of Saint John, and with it the way each member perceives their vocation, has been profoundly shaken. The wounds are still fresh, and the necessary measures regarding sexual abuse do not answer all questions about the meaning of what has been experienced so far, and about how to rebuild relationships on healthier foundations among individuals and between the three institutes (as well as with God). The latest General Chapters, both among the brothers and the sisters, show that the process of breaking free from ascendancy is underway, with the personal and communal journeys that this entails. This discernment process inevitably requires time.

The vast majority of the Brothers and Sisters of Saint John were not aware of what was happening, of these erroneous doctrines not supported by the Church, and of these practices contrary to the respect of individuals and their vows. They may feel betrayed, not only by Father Philippe and by certain superiors or formators, but also by the Dominicans and the Church authorities who did not see fit to supervise Father Philippe more closely and who allowed a religious family to be built on the basis of an unspoken truth, in the name of the secrecy of procedures. Ultimately, they may feel that certain problems attributed to the Family of Saint John (compassion for the 'sinner' rather than for the victims, the right to be forgotten, a misunderstood mercy that relativizes justice, protection of the institution...) were widely shared in the Catholic Church or at least found a favorable environment there. Many are wounded in their trust. Even those who committed sexual abuses did not enter

religious life for that purpose, but to follow Christ in a demanding life dedicated to prayer and evangelization. Their conscience had to be damaged for them to reach that point, and this happened in a Catholic community recognized by the Church. Regardless of their own responsibility, they may feel a certain bitterness.

When considering the contrast between the enthusiasm and the strength of the ideal that animated the community for three decades, and the subsequent revelation of sexual abuses, the history of the Family of Saint John can seem like a waste. However, the path of recognition and humility begun over ten years ago, by increasingly systematically introducing a principle of otherness in its various bodies (calling on external speakers or institutions for formation, experts in its assemblies, testimonies of victims, etc.) and maintaining trust in the Church's guidance, likely also shows that all the qualities initially perceived in the community were not mere illusions. Without downplaying the suffering experienced by too many people, this communal journey, despite its difficulties, testifies that, for the majority of the brothers and sisters, attachment to Christ was stronger than the ascendancy of the founder, the desire for truth deeper than the pretense of having found it, the enthusiasm for the Church's mission more authentic than the intention to spread Father M.-D. Philippe's teachings. Yet, the Community of Saint John can truly rebuild only if the victims of sexual abuse, some of whom are still part of the community, also experience a form of reconstruction, and if the community agrees to take its part in this process, by acknowledging the reality and severity of the abuses, and striving to repair their consequences as much as possible.

Finally, a history of the Community of Saint John not focused on sexual abuses remains to be written and would likely allow, without minimizing the severity of the abuses, to gain perspective on this history, which in some respects goes far beyond the scope of the Family of Saint John itself.

In the early 1960s, the Church thought it had resolved the Eau Vive case. 50 years later, complaints about abuses committed by Father Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier, as well as by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe and many Brothers of Saint John, showed this was not the case. The Eau Vive home had indeed been closed, the culprits sanctioned, but this had not put an end to the abuse, which could spread all the more easily because the case was handled very discreetly. After 60 years, now that this case is well known in the Church, it is hoped that it will be definitively resolved.

VI. POSSIBLE EXTENSIONS

The historical inquiry could be extended in several directions, of which we will mention only a few. The first concerns Father Pierre-Thomas Dehau, as sources might allow for a deeper understanding of his biography, and perhaps more importantly, his doctrine, since it appears that his spiritual doctrine is marked by imbalances that seem to be a source of the abuses committed by himself, his nephews, and their disciples. Some of these imbalances are likely not entirely new and should be placed in the context of the history of Dominican theology and spirituality of the late 19th or early 20th century.

There is undoubtedly also a need to continue the investigation into what happened in the Family of Saint John, both in the analysis of the facts and documents now known, and in extension, as certain aspects have been left aside here, due to a lack of available sources or time. For example, the history of the contemplative sisters and the apostolic sisters deserves to be studied in their own right, as does the Sagesse et Art Chrétien school in Cenves. The work of professional historians will certainly contribute greatly to the understanding of this history.

Studying the influence of the Philippe brothers on other communities could also help to better understand how mechanisms of ascendancy, and sexual abuses accompanied by doctrinal justifications, can be transmitted and transformed through the personalities of founders and superiors. Such an inquiry would also allow for assessing whether the influence attributed to the Philippe brothers is sometimes exaggerated. Time will undoubtedly offer a better perspective, allowing for a clearer view of a narrative that, in certain aspects, is still too recent to be completely grasped in its entirety.

Beyond the specific cases of Father Dehau and the Philippe brothers, there would likely be research to be conducted on the issue of ascendancy and respect for freedom in the context of spiritual guidance, but also in the context of religious life, particularly during the founding of a community. Comparisons with the history of other communities could lead to a better understanding of what happened in the Community of Saint John. Understanding why the regulations that worked at one time were no longer sufficient or failed at another could also be beneficial from a theological perspective. Indeed, the history of the Family of Saint John highlights deficiencies and a certain idealization in the theology of what a founder of a religious community is. From a psychological standpoint too, given the intensity of what is at stake in spiritual guidance and in the founding of a community, a better understanding of what can happen in such situations could promote greater maturity among all actors and prevent such deviations from recurring.

THEOLOGICAL STUDY

To facilitate easier access to the core content of the theological portion of the Interdisciplinary Commission's report, the following overview has been drafted. It does not, of course, cover all points within the report but rather serves as an introduction.

This overview is focused on the weakening of moral conscience, as evidenced by various victims of abuse by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe or other members of the Family of Saint John. One can trace these vulnerabilities of the conscience back to various doctrinal points present in the teachings of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe. However, neither the report itself nor the forthcoming overview intend to comprehensively detail the doctrinal flaws detectable in Father M.-D. Philippe's doctrine. This is primarily due to the adopted methodology, as the first point explains.

OVERVIEW OUTLINE

- Brief remarks on the methodology used
- Abuses touch upon consciences
- Using M.-D. Philippe's authority as a justification for abuses
- Neglect of the Church's doctrine on moral conscience and the subsequent loss of bearings
- Loss of objective bearings is exacerbated by justifications tied to Father M.-D. Philippe's teachings on the Holy Spirit
- Loss of objective bearings is also a result of the ethical doctrine on the 'love of friendship'
- The root of these moral deviations: a certain denial of human nature
- Conclusions

I. BRIEF REMARKS ON THE METHODOLOGY USED

Before delving into the theological part of the Interdisciplinary Commission's report, some clarification on the methodology used is required:

- The work towards drafting this theological and doctrinal section commenced with gathering testimonies from victims abused by Father M.-D. Philippe, as well as brothers and sisters of the Family of Saint John. As a result, these testimonies (italicized) frequently serve as starting points in the subsequent overview. In the interest of discretion, these accounts have been anonymized.
- The authors then explored possible links between these testimonies and the teachings of M.-D. Philippe, as found in his writings, transcriptions of his lectures or seminars. Additionally, teachings from other educators within the Family of Saint John were considered. Due to this approach, only doctrinal flaws traceable from the testimonies could be addressed. This is why neither the report nor its overview identifies all potential doctrinal deficiencies in Father M.-D. Philippe's teachings.

- The Roman Catholic Church's doctrine, especially the Catechism of the Catholic Church (henceforth abbreviated as: CCC), along with two authors favored by M.-D. Philippe himself: Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas, were used as references. This allowed for identifying discrepancies between these sources and the teachings of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe.

II. ABUSES TOUCH UPON CONSCIENCES

As mentioned, we shall begin with testimonies from Father M.-D. Philippe's victims:

The worst part was that we were all obliged to view these evidently bizarre situations as normal. We were to remain silent. We were not to judge. We were not to think about what happened to others.

Before Father Marie-Dominique, my ability to reason is silenced. He once told me that I should 'never attempt to analyze' the events of my spiritual life, over which he has already assumed control, linking spiritual power abuse to sexual abuse. He sets, as a requirement for my spiritual life, a prohibition to think.

Due to the abuses, inhibited judgment and a gradual loss of direction are evident among victims. A sister from the Family of Saint John, and a victim of internal abuse, testifies:

It was during the period of physical abuse. The actions became increasingly unsettling. In some, I sensed no tenderness. I am in utter confusion. Unable to discern right from wrong, utterly lost and unsure how to proceed in this relationship, I turned to Father Marie-Dominique Philippe's discernment, as my conscience no longer guided me.

The abused individual (by someone other than Father M.-D. Philippe) turns to Father Philippe, seeking the clarity her conscience no longer provides, precisely due to the endured abuses.

III. USING M.-D. PHILIPPE'S AUTHORITY AS A JUSTIFICATION FOR ABUSES

Against the backdrop of a victim's clouded conscience, M.-D. Philippe's authority is invoked to justify the abuses. A distortion of ecclesial doctrine regarding the ordained ministry also played a significant role. In particular, the misguided understanding of the priest's instrumentality, as if this instrumentality applied to all his actions and words, often unduly reinforced his authority within the Family of Saint John. Thus, a lack of sacramental and ecclesiological formation facilitated sexual abuses and abuses of conscience. Overall, the abuses were committed relying on the spiritual direction or teaching of Father M.-D. Philippe or other priest brothers, taken as near-absolute references.

For instance, a sister, who had been kissed on the mouth for a long time by her spiritual father (a brother of Saint John), received this explanation from him:

He explained to me that he had prayed and discussed it with Father [M.-D. Philippe] to see if he could do it. [The latter had replied] that there was nothing contrary to love in this act ... and he did it again. I consented because his arguments seemed convincing to me.

The victim's consent stems from an argument of authority: the affirmation obtained by the abuser from Father M.-D. Philippe. The ascendancy, leading the victim to agree to an act she would otherwise reject, is amplified by this doctrinal justification.

This sentiment is echoed in the testimony of another victim of a brother:

Confronted with my doubts, [the abusive priest, a brother of Saint John] quotes the founder's teachings (the founder is thus referred to as the father): 'Do not yield to the critical and skeptical spirit, the spirit of the One who divides; 'Make yourself dependent on someone greater than you in trust and love, and you will be free'; 'Love surpasses understanding'; 'Be like Mary who said yes to everything, even before understanding.'

The abuser calls for blind trust in his actions, referencing the teachings of Father M.-D. Philippe.

To summarize:

- Even in the midst of ascendancy and abuse, the overvaluation of the priest and doctrinal justification have further neutralized the reaction of the conscience, including that of the abuser.
- As a result, disorientation intensifies at a critical juncture in the abuse. The abuse can continue and even escalate.
- Such justifications played a role in the spread of abusive behaviors within the Family of Saint John.

IV. NEGLECT OF THE DOCTRINE ON MORAL CONSCIENCE AND THE SUBSEQUENT LOSS OF BEARINGS

This point is elaborated by distinguishing three notions of moral theology: synderesis, moral conscience, and natural law.

a. Non-recognition of the Natural Character of Morality's Principles

Let us recall that, for Saint Thomas Aquinas and the moral tradition, synderesis is a stable disposition (a *habitus*) in a person's intellect, which naturally inclines them towards good and repels them from evil¹. Synderesis allows us to innately understand the primary principles of moral action, especially the most fundamental ones: we must do good and avoid evil. Although he was formed in Thomistic thought, Father M.-D. Philippe rarely mentioned synderesis in his teachings.

He even contested the natural character of the primary principles of moral action:

It seems that the knowledge of primary practical principles is gained within traditional settings, wherein a child emulates what he sees his elders do. It is from this emulation that primary principles arise. [...] Hence, there's significant interdependence in acquiring practical principles and the emergence of moral conscience. [...] Insofar as these primary practical principles are learned through emulation, all imaginable deviations become possible².

According to this text by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, knowledge of the primary principles of practical action is acquired. It stems from emulating those whom the child observes. Undoubtedly, this explanation holds some truth. However, it deviates from Thomistic doctrine by not mentioning any 'natural' (innate) origin in this knowledge of moral principles.

Let's highlight three points here:

- Father M.-D. Philippe virtually denies that the understanding of primary practical principles arises from a natural disposition (*habitus*) in the acting individual.
- In any case, the reference to an objective moral truth is absent in his explanation. This goes against the consistent teachings of the Church, reiterated by Pope Francis: '[...] the Church emphasizes the existence of objective moral norms, valid for everyone' (Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 64).
- Such doctrinal shifts can be traced back to M.-D. Philippe's teaching period at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) in the 1950s.

¹ See, for instance, THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* [hereafter abbreviated as ST] I, q. 79, a. 12.

² M.-D. PHILIPPE, *La philosophie de l'activité morale* [The Philosophy of Moral Activity], n.d. (likely the 1950s), pp. 97-98.

b. The Disappearance of the Concept of Moral Conscience

The concept of moral conscience, still discussed in the handout '*La philosophie de l'activité morale*' [*The Philosophy of Moral Activity*] we just cited, gradually faded to a mere residual presence in M.-D. Philippe's teachings.

Thus, the book summarizing Father M.-D. Philippe's doctrine, *Lettre à un ami* [*Letter to a Friend*], never mentions 'moral conscience'. The same goes for other foundational books by the same author, like *De l'amour* [*On Love*]¹ or the first volume of *Retour à la source* [*Return to the Source*]².

c. The Relegation of Natural Law to the Realm of Faith

According to Father M.-D. Philippe, 'natural law' is not accessible, except to the believer:

[...] I have no immediate experience of natural law. If I'm a believer, I see it with wisdom. At its core, natural law stems from a vision of wisdom: if God is the Creator of human nature, or rather of the human soul, there are profound intentions of God that I must strive to discover gradually. And God can dictate the law to me. But for God to dictate the law to me, faith is required; one must believe in this God, and I cannot base human morality on faith³.

This teaching by Father M.-D. Philippe doesn't align with Saint Thomas Aquinas's explanation of natural law. Indeed, according to Thomas Aquinas, natural law derives its origin and name from the fact that reason is naturally capable of discerning what is good and what is evil⁴. The Church's doctrine has widely confirmed this teaching⁵.

It's evident that the various concepts we've just mentioned are closely related. Synderesis, moral conscience, and natural law are three ways of affirming the significance and fundamentally innate nature of morality in a human being. To support this, two recent texts from the solemn and ordinary magisterium of the Catholic Church can be cited:

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart⁶.

Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed⁷.

The scarcity of teachings on moral conscience and synderesis in Father M.-D. Philippe's work could be attributed to his struggles, in certain situations, to delineate good from evil in practical scenarios. Two testimonies support this:

I believe that [Father Marie-Dominique Philippe] was never truly able to help a brother; he could never clearly distinguish between right and wrong.

Father Philippe never explicitly voiced what one could or couldn't do, leaving the door wide open to any interpretations. One was not supposed to discuss it, not even with him. His sole response was: 'Very good, very good, put all this in the heart of the Virgin Mary.'

In conclusion, the omission or distortion of these fundamental moral notions in Father M.-D. Philippe's doctrine can only result in one outcome: both the perpetrator and the victim lose their moral compass even more.

¹ *Ibid.*, *De l'amour* [*On Love*], Paris, Mame, 1993

² *Ibid.*, *Retour à la source* [*Return to the Source*], Vol. 1, Paris, Fayard, 2005.

³ *Ibid.*, *Les trois sagesse*s [The Three Wisdoms], Paris, Fayard, 1994, pp. 97-98 [italics in original].

⁴ See THOMAS AQUINAS, ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

⁵ Cf. CCC, n° 1954–1960.

⁶ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Gaudium et Spes*, n° 16.

⁷ CCC, n° 1780.

V. LOSS OF OBJECTIVE MORAL BEARINGS AND TEACHINGS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Let's begin with these victims' testimonies:

Even though our interactions weren't 'complete' – [X] said that they shouldn't be, or they would no longer be of the Holy Spirit – our relationship truly became physical and vividly consumed my life. Admittedly, especially in the beginning, I wasn't always at peace with my conscience. I kept a letter from [X] where [X] wrote about a day I broke down crying. Yet, relying on [X], I came to believe that I needed to enlighten my conscience.

[The abusive brother] explained to me [...] that I was managing my life, whereas I should be letting myself be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Such testimonies can be linked to the following excerpt from a retreat given by Father M.-D. Philippe, in the Family of Saint John, in 2005:

It's [Jesus and Mary] who must assist us in understanding the extent to which our love for our brothers and sisters should be manifested. It's not us who determine this, it's God, it's the Holy Spirit, and we must always surrender everything to Him, continuously seeking His guidance on how to embody this tender affection, this human love [...].

The action of the Holy Spirit, as conceived by M.-D. Philippe, is something one must completely surrender to, devoid of genuine discernment, both rational and spiritual.

This stands in contrast to the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, who emphasized the significance of human action in cooperation with the Holy Spirit: 'Man [...] is led by the Holy Spirit in such a way that [Man] also acts, as he possesses free will.'¹

Even if it contradicts moral conscience, abuse becomes justifiable in the name of the Holy Spirit's action. Here's how a brother realized the falsity of dissociating the Holy Spirit's action and the testimony of the conscience:

John Paul II [wrote] in his encyclical on the Holy Spirit: 'the primary path through which the Holy Spirit passes is conscience.'² For me, this marked the beginning of the system's collapse. I thought: 'How can they tell you to act against your conscience when that's the primary path, the very basics of the Holy Spirit?'

More broadly, Father Philippe's entire conception of the Holy Spirit's action proves problematic. This conception spread among certain Brothers of Saint John, influenced by the founder.

In a document from 1956, when Dominicans Marie-Dominique Philippe and Louis-Bertrand Geiger were concurrently professors at the University of Fribourg:

When the affair of his brother Thomas [Philippe] became known, Father Geiger related this statement from Father Marie-Do [Marie-Dominique Philippe]: 'The superiors understand nothing about the Holy Spirit.'

This text shows that Father M.-D. Philippe believed he had a different understanding of the Holy Spirit and its ascendancy on humans compared to his superiors.

Here's another testimony from a brother of Saint John: He conveys the justifications of an abuser who drew inspiration from Father Philippe, with whom he was closely connected:

Ultimately, the Holy Spirit is free from laws; freedom comes from the Spirit. There's the law of chastity, but God is free; He can ask for something different, more. [...] The Holy Spirit can require some to do things that aren't according to the law. For some, it's a way of life.

This notion of the Holy Spirit's action sets it against the law, paving the way for deviations and their legitimization.

¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, ST I-II, q. 68, a. 3, ad 2.

² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem [same name in English]*, May 18, 1986, No. 43. The exact phrasing is: 'The Gospel's "convincing concerning sin" under the influence of the Spirit of truth can be accomplished in man in no other way except through the *conscience*' (italics in original).

Let's quote another victim:

One shouldn't [...] resist the freedom of the Holy Spirit, which blows where it wishes, and thus also on unfamiliar paths, like those [of abuse].

This claim is validated by Father M.-D. Philippe's problematic analysis of the application of the 'gift of counsel' (one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit) to 'fraternal charity':

[...] It is with regard to fraternal charity in its deepest sense [that the gift of counsel] is ultimately exercised; prudence gives way to a divine keenness and finesse, which are the direct effects of this total docility, this fundamental dependence on the Father's good pleasure¹.

The replacement of 'prudence' with 'total docility' towards the Father's 'good pleasure' tends to numb the victim's conscientious reaction to the aggression of their abuser. It should be noted that Church doctrine never separates the gifts of the Holy Spirit from moral virtues (see CCC, n° 1266² and 1830–1831³). These are in no way supplanted by the exercise of the gifts, that is, docility towards the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The issue here is that the action of the Holy Spirit is conceived:

- on one hand, as suppressing the exercise within us of reason and virtues;
- and on the other, as justifying actions contrary to common morality and Church teachings.

VI. LOSS OF OBJECTIVE BEARINGS, A RESULT OF THE DOCTRINE ON THE 'LOVE OF FRIENDSHIP'

M.-D. Philippe developed a philosophical ethic based on the experience of the 'love of friendship' (*l'amour d'amitié*). This term, borrowed from Thomas Aquinas⁴, has, in the teachings of Father M.-D. Philippe, masked various moral deviations. Four points will be successively studied: the professed absence of an objective morality and reference to the law (a); the blurred line between friendship and conjugality (b); the excessive focus on moral intention, neglecting other components of a human act (c); the legitimization of lies (d).

a. **Absence of objective morality:** the following testimony relates Father M.-D. Philippe's doctrine on the 'love of friendship' to deviations in moral order:

[...] Father Philippe taught that what permitted the 'gestures of friendship' was what the friend could receive, tolerate - there was no longer any objective morality, we were in pure subjectivity. In themselves, these acts are therefore a good thing. Such was Father Philippe's thinking that br. [Z] had adopted, which justified all kinds of deviations [...]. Father Philippe [...] reminded me of the primary rule of the 'love of friendship': what each can bear determines the gestures we can make. And thus, we shouldn't burden others with what they can't bear.

In the name of the love of friendship, without reference to an objective moral truth, the grip of the abuser knows no safeguard.

Two testimonials show that 'human laws' were believed to be surpassed by the love of friendship or so-called spiritual love:

¹ M.-D. PHILIPPE, *Le mystère du Christ crucifié et glorifié [The Mystery of the Crucified and Glorified Christ]*, Paris, Fayard, 19962 (1st ed. in 1966), pp. 233-234.

² CCC, n° 1266: '[...] sanctifying grace, the grace of justification, [...] gives [the baptized] the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit; allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues'.

³ CCC, n° 1830 and 1831: 'The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. [...] They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them [...]'.
⁴ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, ST I-II, q. 26, a. 4.

When there is true love, a love of friendship that goes beyond mere friendship or romantic love, thus a spiritual love, nothing bad can occur. Spiritual love transcends human laws.

[Father M.-D. Philippe] destroyed in me the essential bearings of moral conscience by asserting that wrong is right. He explained that when one is spiritual, they are above all human laws.

These testimonials can be related to an excerpt from '*Retour à la source*' [*Return to the Source*], the last work published during Father M.-D. Philippe's lifetime, composed from his teachings:

Initially, [the virtue of prudence] can rely on the law; it uses it. One relies on the law as long as one doesn't have virtue but, when one possesses inner virtue, one surpasses the law, for prudence embodies the fluidity of life. That's why a prudent man can seem very imprudent. [...] A prudent man can therefore commit acts that, from the outside, appear very imprudent¹.

It's evident that such a relativization of the law, in favor of a 'prudence' that can appear very imprudent, contributes to legitimizing abuse in conscience, both for the abuser and the victim.

b. Furthermore, the **taught confusion between the love of friendship and conjugality** added to the loss of objective bearings. A victim, who was then a religious sister, attests to this:

The ethical lessons received in the novitiate didn't [help] me understand that such a friendship isn't possible in religious life. [...] today I realize the massive confusion underlying this discourse: a confusion between friendship mode and romance mode. The various stages of Father Philippe's love of friendship could only apply to couples (love at first sight, choice, decision, life in common...) [...]. The friendship I experienced was incompatible with my [religious] state of life, but none of those responsible for my formation seemed to think so. This relationship prevented me from fully giving myself to Jesus and caused deep inner turmoil and anxiety. We weren't taught the distinction between love and friendship. I felt it in my conscience, but I seemed trapped, especially since those guiding me justified these feelings with theological arguments.

Certain passages in *Au cœur de l'amour* [*At the Heart of Love*], a collection of conversations with Marie-Dominique Philippe by Frédéric Lenoir, showcase intricate thoughts, blurring the lines between friendship and a physical and emotional expression, while devaluing the 'sexual aspect'. Let's read these passages before briefly analyzing them:

[...] spiritual love [...] demands mutual giving, in tenderness and affection; love is expressed more in gentleness and sweetness, in sensitivity, than in the sexual aspect. I know many will say, 'that's a priest speaking!' Well, no, it's not a priest speaking! It's a philosopher. As a philosopher, I can assert that spiritual love connected to sensitivity, thus love that involves the sharing of bodies in sensitivity, goes beyond sexual union. This union has – it's intriguing, the Elders often spoke of this, and I lean on their words, their meaning is clear – a certain opacity: it no longer possesses the clarity of sensitive love. For knowledge and clarity are essential for human love to truly blossom and bring immense joy and fulfillment. Sensitive love fulfills more than the sexual aspect, as the latter is driven by a natural instinct rather than a personal and individual dimension. It's governed by nature and hence always possesses this opacity, this slightly rough edge: indeed, it fulfills the heart of a man and woman less. Of course, this realization can only come through an education that recognizes love needs to be always human to be true, and that this sensitive act of giving our bodies is not the same as the sexual instinct².

[Some couples have succeeded in living with emotional intimacy without the element of the sexual act] Such a relationship demands virtue, a profound virtue, which implies a strong mastery over one's instincts. Such relationships exist; one shouldn't say they don't. But obviously, these aren't the couples showcased because they live out their love in a very discreet manner. The truer the love, the more concealed it remains. When it comes to the sexual perspective – from what I've observed – exhibition often takes the forefront; it's proclaimed, indicating it's less of a love than spiritual love. Spiritual love, connected to sensitivity, is much more clandestine: deeply loving beings don't flaunt it³.

By 'the gift of the bodies' and 'tenderness [...] in sensitivity', it's undoubtedly referring to a sexual commitment in reality, but not culminating in vaginal penetration. This latter action seems to be

¹ M.-D. PHILIPPE, *Retour à la source* [*Return to the Source*], vol. 1, Paris, Fayard, 2005, p. 410.

² *Ibid.*, *Au cœur de l'amour. Entretien sur l'amour, le mariage et la famille* [*At the Heart of Love. Interview on Love, Marriage and Family*], Paris, Fayard, 1987, pp. 122–123.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

what's indicated by the term 'sexual union'. Spiritual love is depicted as excluding vaginal penetration, but not 'the gift of the bodies in sensitivity'. Such a portrayal, besides unduly devaluing the marital sexual act, effectively legitimizes sexual abuse under the guise of 'love of friendship'.

c. **The emphasis on moral intent**, over the recognition of the act itself, facilitated abuse. This is evident in the following testimony:

[...] in the Family of Saint John, we were told to look at intent, and all those in authority always claimed to have good intentions. So, I no longer observed the actions and was unable, unconsciously forbidding myself, to discern whether acts were good or bad on my own.

The philosophical ethics developed by M.-D. Philippe was based on the love of friendship. It inherently incorporated an undue primacy of moral intent in the analysis of the components of a human act. The following excerpts can be cited, from both ends of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe's philosophical career:

Human moral life is only fully present when one can, with clear insight, commit to an act of intention – thereby ascending to this good, as the end-principle¹.

The analysis peculiar to ethics occurs within immanence. We gradually delve into the depth of the voluntary act and see that it encompasses love, intention, and choice – this is its profound structure².

Father M.-D. Philippe's morality focuses on the love of friendship, and the intention and choice that depend on it. It seems to overlook the object and circumstances of the act³, which also contribute to the ethical assessment of a human act. This contrasts with the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas (cf. ST I-II, q. 18, a. 4 and 6) and, of course, that of the Catholic Church (see CCC, nos. 1750–1754).

A brother (who has since left the Congregation of the Brothers of Saint John) even went so far in an article as to explicitly limit the moral quality of an act to that of its intention:

So the question remains as to how we can discern someone's intention to judge an act or event, especially when we only have hints, indirect opinions, or anonymous rumors. Can we rely solely on such hints? Is it fair to suspect a *bad intention, which alone makes the act bad?* And can we truly understand someone's intention without listening to them?

Such 'intentionalism', which mainly considers the intention of the act, is clearly at odds with the teachings of the Church. The latter emphasizes that the good towards which the will is directed (sometimes referred to as the 'matter' of the moral act) is vital for qualifying the morality of an act. The Church's moral doctrine holds, for instance, that certain acts are intrinsically evil, regardless of the intention behind them (abortion being an example). Reference can be made to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC): 'A good intention (for instance, helping one's neighbor) does not make behavior that is intrinsically disordered good or just...' (no. 1753; also see nos. 1755–1756).

The inclination towards intentionalism, on the contrary, may suggest that any action is justifiable as long as it is underpinned by a righteous intention.

d. The undermining of the act in favor of intention within Father M.-D. Philippe's ethics seems to have coexisted with a **legitimization of lying**.

¹ M.-D. PHILIPPE, *La philosophie de l'activité morale [The Philosophy of Moral Activity]*, Fribourg, n.d., p. 35.

² *Ibid.*, *Retour à la source [Return to the Source]*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 207.

³ These elements of a human act, especially detailed by Thomas Aquinas (see ST I-II, q. 7 and q. 18, a. 2 and 3), are absent from Father Philippe's writings about the 'various moments of moral activity': *Polycopié de philosophie de l'activité morale [Handout on the Philosophy of Moral Activity]*, op. cit., pp. 30-87 (Chap. III, beginning on p. 30, is titled 'Divers moments de l'activité morale : l'intention morale' [Various Moments of Moral Activity: Moral Intention]); *Lettre à un ami [Letter to a Friend]*, Paris, Univ. Press, 1990 and 1992² (1st ed. in 1978), pp. 38–39 (the phrase 'divers moments de l'activité morale' [Various Moments of Moral Activity] appears on p. 39); *Retour à la source [Return to the Source]*, op. cit., pp. 195-224.

Multiple witnesses cite justifications of lying by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe. For example, one of Father M.-D. Philippe's victims, who was also victimized by a brother, stated:

One day Father [M.-D.] Philippe even told me that if someone inquired about another individual on matters not directly involving me, it's absolutely essential to lie to safeguard the secrets and intimacy between two people.

Another brother, a victim of abuse who later became an abuser of several women, shared:

I am quite familiar with Father Philippe's stance on lying: one is allowed to lie when the other isn't entitled to know the truth. [...] For Father Philippe, if you aren't supposed to know the truth, one can lie to you. I frequently discussed the issue of lying with him, but never received a clear answer. [...] He would never say such things in public, but on an individual basis, yes.

Such a portrayal of the moral permissibility of lying eventually leads to a clouding and distortion of conscience, to the extent that lying no longer seems like lying. This understanding of sin, contrary to the Church's morality, naturally makes things easier for an abuser. They might think they can rightfully resort to lying, to shield themselves from any allegations and perpetrate their abuses with impunity.

VII. A ROOT OF DEVIATIONS IN THE DENIAL OF HUMAN NATURE

The following testimony highlights the problem of a certain negation of human nature, especially in its 'psychological' dimension:

Of course, if I remained within the perspective of the [Saint John] Community, as I knew it, I would have to deny my experience and fall into the illusory belief that grace does it all. But God never intended to foster ignorance or laziness, and His grace is not 'a pill' you swallow to feel better ... and that's precisely what the Community, as I knew it, failed to understand! It's of little use to keep parroting that 'grace is rooted in nature', if at the same time one denies the very existence of this nature, especially the psychological one! God has crafted such a wonder, such a masterpiece in creating human nature, including its psychological facets. So why demonize it?!

Indeed, we've already noted in various parts of the teachings disseminated by Father M.-D. Philippe, a devaluation or denial of human nature:

- Human nature is no longer viewed as inherently carrying moral determinations that naturally judge right from wrong.
- Human nature isn't respected in the analysis of the Holy Spirit's action upon the individual.

It is now necessary to elaborate on this last point to fully understand the denial of human nature involved. Father M.-D. Philippe's understanding of the 'gifts of the Holy Spirit' indeed detaches them from their human roots. Take for example his portrayal of the 'gift of counsel' in the work *Le mystère du Christ crucifié et glorifié* [*The Mystery of the Crucified and Glorified Christ*]:

The gift of counsel frees us from any human estimation regarding specific objectives and their achievements. It makes us pursue and value them solely in the light of God's good pleasure. [...] the means employed are no longer judged by human reasons but solely based on God's omnipotence. Thanks to this, transcending all prudential measures, the gift of counsel encourages us to offer to God the most legitimate ends of human life¹.

The same applies in a retreat on another gift of the Holy Spirit, the 'gift of wisdom', preached by Father Philippe in 1947:

As soon as the gift of Wisdom takes hold, we find comfort in the Heart of Our Lord, without worry about ourselves, without any reflection [...]. We must never try to look back, even slightly, to reflect upon ourselves and inspect this divine intimacy with human eyes and judgment, with human curiosity [...]. God wants no mixtures; if we wish to infuse a touch of the human, it's over. [...]. We will judge everything in love, just

¹ M.-D. PHILIPPE, *Le mystère du Christ crucifié et glorifié* [*The Mystery of the Crucified and Glorified Christ*], Paris, Fayard, 19962 (1st ed. in 1966), pp. 230-231.

like God. We will have this extraordinary love that resembles God's love, allowing us to delve deep into the hearts of our brothers, of those entrusted to us. We will love them as God loves them, not from the outside, but from within. We will possess them, we will settle within them just as God does, we will be at the very core of their hearts.

In these excerpts, it's not just about transcending human nature by grace (which is accurate), but about a denial of nature (especially prudence¹), since any judgment stemming from human intelligence must be negated so as not to counteract the motion of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, fraternal charity is described here in terms that echo manipulation: 'We will possess them...'

However, the Church's doctrine on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the role of reason within supernatural life is different. It asserts, following Thomas Aquinas, that grace perfects nature and does not eradicate it². Even within the movement of the Holy Spirit, it upholds the exercise of human faculties, particularly reason and prudence, as explicitly highlighted by Thomas Aquinas:

[...] God moves everything, whatever it may be, according to the manner of that [thing] which is moved [...]. Now, it is characteristic of a rational creature to be moved by reasoned pursuit when doing something: this very pursuit is what is termed counsel. [...] prudence, which involves the correctness of reason, is most profoundly perfected and assisted insofar as it is directed and moved by the Holy Spirit³.

If we fully abdicate the judgment of reason, we become incapable of discerning whether an act is sinful or not. This paves the way for confusion between the motion of sexual instinct and passions and that of the Holy Spirit since one forbids oneself from judging in advance. One assumes this way they can transcend common morality, the Magisterium, and ecclesiastical institutions.

Finally, still connected to this undue relativization of human nature and the already-mentioned exaggeration of the priest's instrumentality, we find in M.-D. Philippe a distorted conception of spiritual paternity where the guide is often considered an infallible instrument of God, since moved by the Holy Spirit. This led Father Philippe and some brothers to impose their spiritual direction, undermining the freedom of individuals and in connection with abuses committed by themselves or others. As testified by a sister who was a victim of abuse:

Father M.-D. Philippe told me to trust [Y] and asked me to take him as my spiritual father. I told him I already had a spiritual father. Father M.-D. Philippe persisted.

Father M.-D. Philippe also pressured this sister to confess to him alone about her sins against chastity.

Spiritual guidance was sometimes practiced in the congregation as a direction demanding the obedience of the guided individual, as if there were an implicit vow of obedience from the guided to the guide. A young woman victim of a brother, shares:

I allowed the father to intrude into my spiritual life and confided my life to him. He told me: 'If I am your spiritual father, you must obey me.'

At the core of these exaggerations and distortions, one can discern in the teachings and justifications a tendency to deny the role of humanity within a spiritual mentorship relationship. In reality, behind such a spiritual façade, it's the human element, and at times the most base aspects of it, that prevails. The mentor, presenting himself as a pure instrument of the Holy Spirit, allows himself to take full control over the mentee, even to the point of abuse.

In total, the doctrinal flaws on the diminishing, or even disappearance, of human nature, especially under the ascendancy of the Holy Spirit, have on one hand disarmed the victims and on the other, possibly emboldened the abusers.

¹ In addition to the aforementioned passages, see for instance M.-D. PHILIPPE, *Le mystère du Christ crucifié et glorifié [The Mystery of the Crucified and Glorified Christ]*, op. cit., p. 229.

² Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, ST I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

³ *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 52, a. 1 and 2.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

a. In all these cases, the doctrinal foundation drawn from Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas is not adhered to in the manner in which Father M.-D. Philippe utilized it. There is merely a semblance of loyalty to the Aristotelian or Thomistic teachings. This goes beyond a legitimate creativity within a living tradition. Such clear alterations of Aristotelian or Thomistic and even ecclesiastical doctrine seem to always lean towards justifying abuses.

b. As a result of the abuses, the various doctrinal justifications provided, and the inability of some spiritual mentors to accurately discern right from wrong, moral discernment has been severely compromised in several cases. Victims, under such ascendancy, endured behaviors they would never have accepted under other circumstances.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SYSTEMIC STUDY

This summary of the psychological and systemic study from the report 'To Understand and to Heal' includes an overview of its content (I), an attempt to understand Marie-Dominique Philippe (II), a systemic analysis of the Family of Saint John both historically and today (III), thoughts on trauma and the progress made towards resilience (IV), and finally, a reflection on potential ties between the Eau Vive case and the abuses within the Family of Saint John (V).

In this report, we will refer to systemic theories that analyze the health and pathology of groups, as well as the health and disease of relationships.

We will also refer to psychoanalysis to pose a hypothesis about the behavior of Marie-Dominique Philippe.

The experts were selected from among those who already collaborated with the community of the Brothers of Saint John for formation, the Commission SOS Abuse, and therapeutic accompaniment.

Diagnostic analysis methods were chosen based on the therapeutic process already initiated within the brotherhood.

I. CONTENT OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SYSTEMIC STUDY

The initial questions our work group focused on are as follows:

How can we understand Marie-Dominique Philippe's pathological behavior?

It's not about judging a person or their intentions, but understanding their actions, which have harmed a significant number of people. The psychological damage related to abuse within the Family of Saint John, for some victims, is as severe as that associated with intra-familial incest.

How did abuse become systemic?

As is the approach in systemic studies, we each worked from our expertise without seeking to standardize our perspectives. The objective was more about observing the same reality together and sharing our interpretations and understandings of it. We thus had the following experience: seeing through another's eyes, understanding from a theoretical frame different from our own, enriched each of our reflections without us losing our unique perspective.

- a. How can we understand M.-D. Philippe's behavior?

We had to analyze a vast number of documents. No external expert personally knew M.-D. Philippe. However, all experts met with and guided a significant number of victims and/or perpetrators of abuse. Each section of the study can be read independently. Yet, the sections complement each other and cross-reference, each trying to depict the intricacy of reality without reducing it to a singular viewpoint.

At the 2019 General Chapter, the brothers had asked Dr. D. Struyf to contemplate the psychiatric diagnosis of Marie-Dominique Philippe. However, a psychiatric diagnosis, like any medical diagnosis, primarily aims to identify a pathology for its treatment. Such a diagnosis can only be made in the encounter with a living individual. Psychiatric autopsy is impossible. We cannot assert a psychiatric diagnosis of a deceased person based on testimonies, nor even on the person's writings. The diagnosis is built in a dialogue with the person in question, referencing one or multiple theoretical models. Its purpose is indeed the treatment of a patient.

We are not in that scenario here. Yet, hypotheses to understand the behavior of the founder are necessary to arrive at a diagnosis of the community's functioning, which enables a therapeutic path leading to a positive future. It's not just about understanding the founder's pathology. It's about proposing a model to comprehend the pathology of M.-D. Philippe and its effects on the entire group. How was the community affected by this pathology? What are its manifestations today? And how can we describe the dysfunctions? We aimed to contemplate the diagnosis in a way that paves a path to life and possible healing for the whole Family of Saint John, for victims, and for perpetrators of abuse.

In our work, addressing the first question, 'How can we understand the behavior of M.-D. Philippe?' we opted for two approaches. Firstly, that of Julie Saint Bris, drawing from Jungian psychoanalysis, which provides a humanizing comprehension of human beings without reducing them to a label. Yet, it doesn't overshadow the gravity of destructive behaviors, the darker side of a person, which only became more apparent when denied. The second perspective is systemic: Dr. D. Struyf offers a relational, transgenerational family reading of M.-D. Philippe's behavior.

This diagnostic approach to the founder, we chose to discuss in the second part of the study. We began our work with the second question we posed: 'How did abuse become systemic?'

Why this reversal? Given our decision to compose this work as a foundational step in the therapeutic process for the Family of Saint John, especially for the brotherhood, we aimed to start from the present. Revisit the past to understand today and pave a way for the future: drawing from the life resources available now, recognizing those that have been consistent since the beginning, and, from these foundations, igniting the community's creativity to shape the future.

Only after clearly pinpointing these strengths can we delve into the reality of abuse and grasp the toxic beliefs and relational dynamics that enabled them. Recognizing the harm and the malfunctions is crucial for transformative change. This also raises the question of where these dangerous beliefs stem from and their connection to Eau Vive.

In the comprehensive study of the psychological and systemic aspects, readers are offered several texts, organized logically, aimed at engaging with painful issues while leaning on already well-established resources and resilience paths.

b. How did abuse become systemic?

The first text (D. Struyf) seeks to shed light on the issue of abuse becoming systemic. From testimonies of roughly ten brothers from diverse generations and cultures, it's clear that the problem of sexual abuse hasn't overwhelmed the entire community. A vast majority of the brothers were unaware of the sexual abuses. However, flawed beliefs and relational dysfunctions have permeated the whole group since its inception, with variances across continents and eras.

The second text (G. Hibon) reflects on the unchecked abuse spanning several decades, on the lack of safeguards and interventions, both within and outside the group during this period.

The third text (Y. Dagrégorio) aims to enlighten readers about the control mechanisms that enabled sexual abuse. This text delves into the most painful chapter of the Family of Saint John's history. The identified mechanisms are present in most communities where cult-like behaviors or controlling phenomena have emerged. To name but a few, these include: seduction, idealization of the founder, omnipotence, manipulation of discernment, an inadequate intellectual formation, a hierarchical structure, and even paradoxical injunctions. This work aims to help understand how men and women found themselves ensnared in this web of abuse that deeply wounded them. Moreover, it also aids in understanding how the perpetrators of abuse, both men and women, could find themselves entrenched in this malevolence without realizing it.

M.-D. Philippe holds a particularly unique position as he is, de facto, the linchpin of a system he created, whether knowingly or unknowingly. He became a model for many brothers and sisters, which provides insight into the commonalities found in the testimonies of abuse victims. Y. Dagrégorio's intent was to clearly name the facts without concealing their dark and painful nature. This was to enable brothers and sisters to rectify behaviors they might recognize as their own, having been unaware of their dysfunctional nature until now.

The fourth text (D. Struyf) illuminates the history of the Family of Saint John from the beliefs identifiable in Marie-Dominique Philippe and those close to him. It contemplates the ideal proposed from the foundation, which was and remains the identity bedrock of the group. Within this ideal, it seeks to pinpoint beliefs that perverted the ideal and led either to abuses or to certain dysfunctions still present today.

The fifth text (D. Struyf) tackles the issue of dysfunctions by suggesting a method to delve deeper into this question. This text draws from the testimonies of the brothers of the Prior General's Council, referring to the work done on this topic at the last General Chapter of the Apostolic Sisters. This study could serve as the inception of an in-depth therapeutic process for both brothers and sisters. Thus, it isn't a diagnostic report on the community's current dysfunctions but a proposed working method. This method should encompass all brothers, to become aware of the present dysfunctions and resources, and to stimulate everyone's creativity towards resolving them.

The sixth text (G. Hibon) addresses the resilience journey undertaken since the revelation of abuse in 2013. Recognizing the progress made is vital to fostering trust and hope for the future. Additionally, Gabriel Hibon explores the intricate task of differentiation within the community's Ideal, between life resources and toxic beliefs. Positive and negative facets have intertwined since the outset.

*

Regarding the clinical testimonies cited in the study, Dr. D. Struyf proposed the following method: the content of a testimony is only quoted in the texts if it appears in at least three testimonies, or if it has been published by its author, or if the author has given their consent, or if the individuals have passed away. The credibility of the testimonies is bolstered by their congruence, even though the authors did not collaborate.

II. UNDERSTANDING MARIE-DOMINIQUE PHILIPPE

To address this, we first looked at Marie-Dominique Philippe's psychological makeup (a), followed by his family legacy and its impact on the entire Family of Saint John (b).

a. His Psychological Functioning (J. Saint Bris).

J. Saint Bris offers some hypotheses to better decipher Marie-Dominique Philippe's psychological operations. She seeks to illuminate the possible relationship between his psychological issues, his relational methods, his theological elaborations, and a certain dynamic within the Family

of Saint John. Relying on her experience as a psychoanalyst, she attempts to better understand the origins of the severe abuses that occurred.

Her approach was as follows:

- Identify common behavioral traits of brothers that have come to the attention of the Commission SOS Abuse.
- Propose a hypothesis about Marie-Dominique Philippe's psychological profile, first providing some basic markers on Jungian psychoanalytic concepts she refers to.
- Provide elements that allow the identification of narcissistic issues and character perversion traits.
- Endeavor to understand unconscious representations of maternal and paternal in M.-D. Philippe, as well as his relationship with authority.
- Recognize the ascendancy of Father Dehau and Thomas Philippe.

In her conclusion, Julie Saint Bris writes: 'I hope that this analytical work will shed light on how we're all driven by unconscious data, how personalities are complex, and how good and bad traits are closely intertwined within each of us.'

Julie Saint Bris sought to understand M.D. Philippe's personality. She also questioned where the vulnerabilities in his psychological development might have originated from. Dr. D. Struyf, on the other hand, attempted to answer the following question:

- b. How did the relational dynamics of the Philippe family impact the entire Family of Saint John? (D. Struyf)

To better grasp how M.-D. Philippe has influenced the operations of the Family of Saint John to this day, systemic theories that have studied transgenerational phenomena can be helpful. All of us have been shaped by the relationships we've formed in childhood and adolescence within our family of origin or with others, depending on our personal histories. As adults, we've revisited our memories and made both conscious and unconscious choices based on the values and beliefs established during childhood. We generally became aware of the life forces and desires that have been with us since childhood and that we wish to manifest. We've also recognized some decisions made by our parents that we don't wish to repeat. Through our relationships, we've constructed ideas of what constitutes a 'good mother', a 'good father', a 'beautiful couple', a fraternal bond, a romantic relationship, normal sexuality, just obedience...

Systemic theorists have also described certain 'relationship laws' that must be respected for individuals to maintain psychological well-being and for families to meet the needs of their children. Psychoanalysts too have pondered the importance of such laws in psychological development. The prohibitions of incest and murder are two fundamental laws. Without adhering to these, psychological health becomes impossible, as there's a loss of otherness.

We aren't always capable of recognizing what harmed our relational psychological health during our childhood. When we haven't suffered from the hurt that marked us, there's a strong chance we might replicate it in adulthood, without even realizing it. Moreover, even when we have become aware of the harm inflicted, we might have lost our freedom and continue to perpetuate it despite ourselves.

We believe that this mechanism of transgenerational transmission played a role in the psychological and relational makeup of M.-D. Philippe and his brother, Thomas Philippe, who were accused of repeated sexual abuses. They showed no signs of questioning their actions until the end of their lives. Except for Mother Cécile, the other siblings don't seem to have passed on the same dysfunctions.

M.-D. Philippe had a very rich family life, which didn't encourage him to look beyond family patterns to see what was happening elsewhere. He didn't perceive this insular family life as a suffering or a harm, but rather as a strength. It can be said that M.-D. Philippe replicated within the Family of Saint John what he had experienced: a large self-sufficient family that didn't require external ties. A very

large and vibrant family, full of resources, intelligence, creativity, and generosity, but one that believes it needs no one outside itself for psychological and spiritual health.

P.-T. Dehau was the brother of Élisabeth (Marie-Dominique's mother), her spiritual guide, and the conscience director of the couple. He also became the spiritual companion for M.-D. Philippe from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood until his death. That P.-T. Dehau held so many varied roles in the Philippe family didn't seem to raise eyebrows; quite the contrary. M.-D. Philippe perceived this accumulation of roles positively, and he went on to emulate this dynamic within the Family of Saint John. He would become the founder, the Prior General, the guide, the professor, the father, the confessor to the brothers and sisters, the friend, without ever questioning the implications of holding so many roles simultaneously, giving him boundless power over those he led, with no external checks or balances.

That P.-T. Dehau guided Henri and Élisabeth in the name of God was never a point of contention for M.-D. Philippe. He also found it normal when his uncle pressured him through emotional blackmail to immediately join the Dominicans instead of pursuing a degree in mathematics. He didn't perceive this as manipulation but rather as an expression of God's will upon him. It's evident how certain beliefs formed without his conscious awareness.

Regarding **M.-D. Philippe**, everything had been set in place since his childhood for relationships based on control, abuse of power, and sexual abuse to develop without anyone within the family genuinely recognizing it. The disregard for relationship laws paved the way for power deviations among individuals who, in all likelihood, had the best of intentions.

The phenomena of dominance persisted across generations. Marie-Dominique Philippe's parents found themselves under the control of P.-T. Dehau, who was appointed by his own mother, Marie, as the new family head after his father's death. Then, M.-D. Philippe accepted this dominance from his uncle over him and replicated it within the Family of Saint John, just as his brother, Thomas Philippe, and his sister, Cécile, did in their respective communities.

This submission to another, to whom one grants absolute authority, induces a psychological regression into infantile dependence and, for some, can be the gateway into mental illness. Regrettably, this is what we've observed in numerous victims. Some even became perpetrators of abuse or engaged in daily manipulations. Therapeutic work can certainly help to escape this phenomenon of contagion and the transfer of relational harm. However, the absolute prerequisite is to acknowledge the harm that has taken over us and to genuinely wish to eradicate it, both internally and in our interactions with others. This is only possible with the aid of external parties.

At times, this realization doesn't occur in some individuals because the harm isn't recognized as such, or not entirely. It then continues to spread.

III. SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS OF THE FAMILY OF SAINT JOHN: FROM ITS ORIGINS TO TODAY

To better grasp the 'myth' of the Family of Saint John, that is, its ideal, both originally and today, Dr. D. Struyf invited about ten brothers to explore with her how the community functioned as they perceived it from their entry to the present day.

The brothers who assisted in this endeavor represent different generations of brothers and diverse cultures. They were introduced to a method typically used in systemic analysis. The task was to read Alain's testimony, his journey within the Holy Cross community, a new community quite distinct from

the Family of Saint John, a testimony published in 'Les naufragés de l'Esprit' [*Castaways of the Spirit*]¹ in May 1996.

The brothers were asked to answer several questions regarding this testimony and then to identify similarities and differences between this account and their own experiences at Saint John. The mediation of an external testimony allows for the exploration of topics that might not have been considered spontaneously. Dr. D. Struyf hopes that the brothers' accounts will inspire more within the Family of Saint John.

She was struck by the quality of the testimonies, their depth, and how they enriched one another. She was also taken aback by the varying experiences across generations and cultures: she believes these differences hold a vast potential for mutual aid and future dialogue within the Community.

The brothers who undertook this review, as far as can be determined, were not direct victims of the sexual abuse system. Within the Family of Saint John, there was a divide between those in the know and those kept in the dark. A reexamination of history by the group of brothers who were not, or are no longer, ensnared in the most toxic beliefs is crucial to pinpoint dysfunctional relationships present from the start, but more importantly, to identify the life forces present from the beginning and the new ones emerging today. If these vital forces weren't present, the community would have perished long ago.

A family or community group can transform with external assistance by harnessing its life forces and stimulating its creativity. This self-healing effort requires the group to recognize the harm that paralyzes it. Systemic ailments stiffen operations, hinder progress, and block the change processes essential to keeping relationships alive.

- **What do the interviewed brothers say about their community, with the oldest having joined in 1980 and the youngest in 2018?**

I will only cite a few examples in this summary document:

- Our community was born from the desire of Marie-Dominique Philippe's students to establish a community, not from the founder's wish. This group of students did not live with him. They had other teachers. They were familiar with several religious families, experiencing diversity within the Church. Our community was birthed within the Church, rooted in Dominican, Cistercian, Benedictine traditions ... the teachings were varied and open, even if Marie-Dominique Philippe often criticized his colleagues, giving us the illusion that he was superior to many other intellectuals.
- After settling in France, things changed: our community increasingly turned inwards. It became centered on Marie-Dominique and his teachings, which became increasingly exclusive. The brothers close to Marie-Dominique Philippe played a significant role in making him a unique reference in thought.
- The founder was viewed by some as infallible, as if he had a direct connection with God. Deep-seated beliefs became stronger than common sense.
- We didn't feel the founder intruded into our personal lives. The founder wasn't omnipresent in our day-to-day lives. There was a lot of freedom in the priories.

- **What do the brothers say about their founder?**

What struck Dr. D. Struyf in the brothers' responses was their paradoxical view of their founder. She tried to summarize these paradoxes, which might help understand the complexity and confusion some brothers find themselves in. Here are some examples:

¹ By Thierry BAFFOY, Antoine DELESTRE, Jean-Paul SAUZET, *Les naufragés de l'Esprit [Castaways of the Spirit]*, Paris, Seuil, 1996, 336 p..

- In spiritual guidance, we felt deeply understood by him. Yet later on, I often felt he only listened to himself.
- He made us experience mercy. But he was also very unjust to some.
- His intellectual work and pursuit of truth impressed us. Yet, in reality, he sometimes lied.
- He encouraged us to think for ourselves, yet at the same time, he forbade us to think.
- He granted us freedom, yet simultaneously confined us.
- He gave the impression of great intellectual maturity. Yet emotionally, he was immature.

M.-D. Philippe was probably unaware of these paradoxes. There's no evidence to suggest he tried to address them. This division doesn't allow for self-unification in a maturation process, in becoming subjective. If one doesn't recognize their emotional life and doesn't work on it with others, maturity and the possibility of otherness don't develop. Did M.-D. Philippe ever meet a man or woman who helped him truly be himself with others? The adulation he received surely didn't help him grow emotionally mature or heal from his narcissistic symptoms.

We now come to the crucial questions we must ask today: *what are the toxic beliefs that have permeated the Family of Saint John? What relational dysfunctions persist to this day? Are today's dysfunctions still tied to certain misguided, or even toxic, beliefs that have been present since the community's inception? Are these beliefs open to questioning today, or are they still conflated with The Truth?*

Dr. D. Struyf has identified some dangerous beliefs held by M.-D. Philippe. Most of these beliefs became sources of abuse because they were shared by a group of individuals who reinforced each other in their convictions. Some beliefs were public. They can be identified in the writings and lectures of Marie-Dominique Philippe. Other beliefs were more secretive and were passed on, more or less explicitly, to those involved in sexual abuse practices, both as victims and perpetrators.

Here are some beliefs that have been identified, detailed in the Report, that have corrupted the community's ideal:

- Beliefs about the ideal of authority-obedience relationships.
- Beliefs concerning sexuality.
- Mystical beliefs and the interpretation of signs.
- Beliefs about psychological suffering identified as the work of the devil or, conversely, idealized as a sign of holiness.
- Beliefs in mercy without reference to justice.
- Beliefs opposing those of the Church in defining good and evil; theological representations not in line with the Church's tradition (See the theologians' report).

Research into the beliefs of M.-D. Philippe and his Family of Saint John led to the following hypothesis: M.-D. Philippe might not have been aware of the harm he was causing. Dr. D. Struyf even believes he intended to do good through his sexual practices. Did he have moments of doubt? Did he try to alleviate his doubts through intellectual work? By constructing misguided theological beliefs? He was also reassured by all those who reinforced his beliefs.

The comprehensive study sheds some light on this challenging question: how is it possible to violate humanity's most fundamental taboo, the incest taboo, without being aware of the harm one is causing? To understand, one must turn to psychoanalysis, which explains mechanisms of repression and the workings of the unconscious. Systemic theories also illuminate the power dynamics that enable abuse.

The main site of this ascendancy, the transmission of beliefs, and abuse, was primarily spiritual guidance within the Family of Saint John (see the historical study). The spiritual guidance relationship with Marie-Dominique Philippe followed the relational model passed down by his uncle, Father Pierre Thomas Dehau.

- **What remains today of these dangerous beliefs and the dysfunctions they built within the Family of Saint John?**

Dr. D. Struyf assisted the *Dysfunction* Commission in preparing the General Chapter of the Apostolic Sisters in 2021. The sisters undertook significant work, involving the conventual chapters, to identify the dysfunctions and resources of their community from its inception to the present. This work continues to outline concrete paths for necessary reform.

After receiving approval from the Prioress General of the Apostolic Sisters, the sisters' document was shared with the Council of the Prior General of the brothers. They were asked to inform Dr. D. Struyf about the dysfunctions mentioned by the sisters that also existed among the brothers and to identify dysfunctions specific to the brothers. They were asked to do the same regarding the life resources.

Most of the issues are found in both communities, with some differences and specificities. The same goes for the resources. This isn't surprising, as the founder's impact on the myth of the Family of Saint John was as significant among the brothers as it was among the sisters, in both its positive and toxic aspects. There's significant work to be done within the Family of Saint John to identify the misguided beliefs still active today in the dysfunctions.

For instance, the brothers cite this dysfunction:

Brothers who have held responsibilities struggle to self-reflect, to consider the possibility that their own flaws might have resonated with those of the founder. Their obedience is, therefore, only superficial. (Let's set aside a few cases of clear disobedience). Unfortunately, these brothers influence others over whom they hold sway.

Does this mean that some brothers are still divided and thus unable to truly collaborate with the governance and the entire congregation? Might they still rely on certain beliefs, theological, philosophical, spiritual, and psychological convictions of the founder, which have 'shaped' them? Do they need these convictions to prevent themselves from falling apart? Are they still under the founder's ascendancy, in a submissive-dependence, an impossible differentiation, an impossible subjectification that would allow unification and maturation? This issue should be analyzed to offer them appropriate help if they desire.

Others might have understood M.-D. Philippe's mistakes but haven't yet rebuilt new bearings with others. They then find themselves in the darkness of mourning, without a compass.

Beyond beliefs, there are also relational habits established from the beginning, by imitating the functioning of certain leaders. Here's an example cited by the brothers:

There are strong avoidance mechanisms in place, leading to a tendency not to genuinely address issues. This mechanism is also used by some brothers to avoid being disturbed. They simply need to get angry when a sensitive topic is introduced: the usual reflex of most brothers will then be not to push further to avoid confrontation...

Theological and historical studies are also crucial to address the issue of toxic beliefs leading to abuse and persistent relational dysfunctions. All this painful material can become the foundation for transformation and new maturity, thanks to increased awareness.

IV. TRAUMA AND THE PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS RESILIENCE

When a group experiences trauma, its identity becomes significantly weakened, as do interpersonal bonds. Trauma is spoken of when a group falls victim to a harm so violent that it shakes the foundational identity of individuals and their relational resources.

This is what happened to the Family of Saint John. Victims of abuse are, of course, the first to be affected by this harm. But they are not the only ones. Every member of the Family of Saint John felt the trauma head-on. Sometimes, the psychological collapse is even more profound in indirect victims.

For instance, in a family, the assault of a teenager might affect her mother more than the teenager herself. This is even more apparent in cases of incest committed by a father. To heal from trauma, one must recognize the harm that affected us and confront this pain. Some victims within the Family of Saint John either didn't perceive the harm as harmful or downplayed it, perhaps to preserve their love for the perpetrator, or to maintain their sense of belonging to the community, or for other reasons. When harm is denied, there's a high risk of its recurrence. Some victims might then become perpetrators of power abuse, spiritual abuse, sexual abuse, or adopt relational stances that enable these abuses. It's essential to recognize both the harm endured and the harm done, in its individual and collective, systemic dimensions, to move beyond it.

To support a traumatized group, one must revisit the group's myth, introduce 'mythical grafts' (grafting new ideal representations) that reignite desire, hope, and the forging of a life path: it involves recognizing the original ideal and assessing what weakened the group and allowed deviations. Then, this ideal must be reformulated for the future, incorporating an understanding of the history of deviations, highlighting life forces, and representations that allow belief in a possible future.

In the formation of young brothers on systemic dimensions, with Brother Gonzague de Longcamp, we introduced an exercise around defining the 'ideal brother' within the Saint John community and how this ideal varies across cultures. The young brothers also had to identify flaws that the community couldn't accept. This exercise revealed that many of the identified qualities were present from the foundation. However, new qualities had emerged, and the flaws that had enabled abuses were clearly named. This indicates that the formation of young brothers today is based on a series of 'mythical grafts' (i.e. new ideal representations) that have corrected the toxic representations that allowed abuse.

Significant support for resilience has indeed been underway for about a decade now. Brother Gabriel Hibon elaborates on this topic in his piece 'And now? Means of resilience, mobilizing life forces, formation.'

V. EAU VIVE AND THE FAMILY OF SAINT JOHN

We now come to the question posed at the 2019 General Chapter: what connection can be made between the Eau Vive case in the 1950s and the abuses within the Family of Saint John?

Our hypothesis is as follows: we believe that M.-D. Philippe saw his uncle's guidance as an ideal and replicated this model within the Family of Saint John.

We think that M.-D. Philippe was under the psychological ascendancy of his uncle until the end of his life, despite his uncle's condemnation by the Church.

Several beliefs passed down by P.-T. Dehau facilitated the spread of abuse. They are easily identifiable in his book *Ève et Marie [Eve and Mary]*¹, concerning spiritual guidance: *the spiritual father leads his mentee in the name of God. He alone has the grace to discern right from wrong. The mentee owes him obedience and gives up personal discernment. To obey the spiritual father is to obey God. One should not question. The founder, the guide, and the superior know what's best for you better than you do.*

Everything was set for a transmission of ascendancy, much like Russian dolls that fit one inside the other, from generation to generation.

¹ P.-Th. DEHAU, *Ève et Marie [Eve and Mary]*, Bouvines, Éd. du Monastère du Cœur Immaculé, 1950.

TO UNDERSTAND AND TO HEAL

REPORT CONCLUSION

The authors of this report had not initially anticipated that the study requested by the General Chapter of the Brothers of Saint John in 2019 would result in such an extensive document. However, faced with a complex and serious topic, they opted for detailed narratives and in-depth analyses. Ultimately, the three main sections of this report, representing three distinct perspectives on the same subject, provide insights which we wish to briefly summarize in this conclusion.

A. History

The historical section of this report highlighted the connections between sexual abuse within the Family of Saint John and what is now commonly referred to as 'the Eau Vive case'. Nevertheless, it helps us understand that what transpired within this religious family is not a mere repetition of the events from the 1950s. There are indeed similarities, but also differences.

Among the similarities between the two cases, Eau Vive and Saint John, we can note the following:

- Self-referencing by brothers Thomas and Marie-Dominique Philippe.
- The sanctification of the spiritual father, seen as an almost infallible divine instrument.
- A strong phenomenon of spiritual control.
- Justifications for sexual abuse that transcend common morality in the name of a deeper union with God.
- Secret justifications hidden behind an overall orthodox theology, which receives the support of the ecclesiastical institution.

The most significant difference likely lies in the nature of the relationships between the various individuals involved in the abuse. Around Father Thomas Philippe, there was a sect-like group, known as the 'little ones', whose members were well-acquainted and openly communicated about their practices. In contrast, the relationships between those involved in the abuse within the Family of Saint John did not bring them together in a manner of explicit mutual recognition. However, it seems that some close to M.-D. Philippe sensed they shared a similar 'secret'. This did not lead to acknowledged ties between them or a 'group consciousness' for at least three reasons:

- Father M.-D. Philippe, likely wary from the condemnations of 1956 and 1957, made great efforts to conceal the practices in question, ensuring he taught nothing explicitly incriminating and establishing a separation between the involved parties.
- This separation was all the more feasible as these individuals were connected to Father M.-D. Philippe through a vertical relationship that took precedence over horizontal ones.
- The fear of indiscretions in a family setting where secrets could easily be divulged.

It's also worth noting that neither Father Marie-Dominique Philippe nor the brothers and sisters of Saint John who committed abuses shared the most delusional justifications of his brother, even though they both held a set of mystico-sexual beliefs. These differences can partly be understood because the deviations of the founder of the Family of Saint John seem more closely linked to those

of his uncle, Father Pierre-Thomas Dehau, than to those of his brother. The Eau Vive case and the abuse within the Family of Saint John ultimately appear as two distinct developments, with their similarities perhaps stemming from a common origin in Father Dehau.

The historical section has shed light on the journey of Father M.-D. Philippe. It became evident that, as early as the 1950s, he exhibited abusive sexual behaviors similar to those of his uncle, his brother Thomas, and his sister Cécile. The sanctions against the latter in 1956 and those imposed on him in 1957 (carefully concealed and swiftly lifted by the Master General of the Dominican Order) did not shake Father Marie-Dominique Philippe's convictions. They seem to have only heightened his skills in deceit and concealment. Remarkable abilities that subsequently allowed him to evade any complaints and sanctions during his lifetime, despite decades of sexual abuse and a significant number of victims. Perhaps indicating how deeply his distorted beliefs were rooted, there's no evidence of any genuine remorse. Preferring a secret truth shared by the closest members of his family over the common teachings of Catholic tradition on morality, he firmly entrenched himself in a self-referential stance. It's regrettable that, as far as we know, he didn't seek to question his mystico-sexual beliefs and practices with informed individuals outside his family circle¹. This likely touches on the primacy of the family circle over any external reference among the members of what can be termed the Dehau-Philippe clan.

From 1975 onwards, Father Marie-Dominique Philippe found himself at the helm of a foundation comprising hundreds of young monks and nuns, over whom he wielded, perhaps unwittingly, intellectual and spiritual ascendancy. While acknowledging the good he may have done elsewhere, it's clear that he played a central, both direct and indirect, role in the spread of sexual abuse among the brothers and sisters. His role was direct, with the complicity of Alix Parmentier, due to his own abuses and because he either endorsed abusive situations or turned a blind eye. Clear words, firm decisions, and sanctions would have enlightened consciences and allowed victims to break free from the control and confusion in which they were trapped. He played an indirect role through the intellectual and spiritual formation he provided, as it fostered ambiguous relationships, spiritual and sexual abuses among several brothers and sisters, as particularly highlighted in the theological section of the report. The central role of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe in the propagation of abuse does not absolve the perpetrators of their own responsibility. However, it is the root cause of the systemic nature of the abuses that took place within the Family of Saint John.

The systemic nature of these abuses cannot be separated from the ecclesiastical context, itself marked by dysfunctions, notably the lack of firm responses from the hierarchy to deviant situations and the sanctification of an authority figure, as highlighted by the CIASE report in France. Even if not always for the same reasons, the way abuse cases were handled within the Saint John community did not fundamentally differ from the general manner in which they were addressed within the Catholic Church. One might speculate that had the 1957 sanctions against Father Marie-Dominique Philippe not been concealed and had they not been lifted, his potential for harm would have been significantly reduced.

Beyond the connection of abuses within the Family of Saint John to the Eau Vive case, the historical section also detailed how, around 2010, there emerged a growing awareness within the Family of Saint John that there was a fundamental issue regarding morals that needed addressing. This realization stemmed from the testimonies of victims, which were pivotal in challenging the convictions of the brothers and sisters. A significant step in this process was the 2013 initiative by the Prior General of the brothers to disclose the moral misconduct of the founder. This marked the beginning of a communal journey of distancing and disengagement from him. Like any liberation from ascendancy, this process is ongoing, dependent on the directions taken by religious bodies, especially the General Chapters, and the individual journeys of each member.

¹ As genuine mystics do, who, fearing self-deception, submit their path to the Church.

B. Theology

The theological section examined the justifications used in cases of abuse within the Family of Saint John. It highlighted the continuity between these justifications and what Father Marie-Dominique Philippe had previously expressed in defense of his brother, Thomas Philippe, during the Eau Vive case in the 1950s. The study also revealed numerous links between these justifications and the philosophical, theological, and spiritual doctrine publicly taught by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, which formed the primary framework for the formation of the brothers and sisters. While possessing positive elements, the intellectual work of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe nonetheless contains deficiencies and errors. These blurred or entirely obscured certain fundamental moral bearings for some brothers and sisters, thereby facilitating and at times legitimizing concurrent spiritual and sexual abuses. It recalls certain aspects of the error of Quietism in the 17th century, particularly its tendency to overlook the role of the creature in God's work. This resulted in a weakening and distortion of moral theology, which left victims defenseless in the face of the abuses they endured.

Consequently, the distinction between public teaching and a hidden doctrine needs to be nuanced, at least in the case of M.-D. Philippe. While he might have shared certain justifications privately with some, he openly promoted erroneous positions in his writings, courses, and lectures.

A deep analysis reveals that in moral theology, and more fundamentally in understanding the determinants of human nature, Father Marie-Dominique Philippe distanced himself from the thoughts of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and the doctrine of the Catholic Church. Among these errors and deficiencies, which are not immediately or easily discernible, one can highlight, for instance, the diminished role of moral virtues compared to theological virtues and especially the gifts of the Holy Spirit; the near-disappearance of moral conscience judgment; the primacy given to intention in analyzing the morality of an act; the emphasis on a concept of love of friendship that is quite distant from that of Thomas Aquinas, etc. Generally, determinants, especially those brought by moral virtues, are largely disqualified in favor of the end goal. This unfortunately led to the blurring of boundaries and safeguards. So many forbidden paths were opened for abuse. A specific point concerns intimate gestures, which in the teachings and practice of M.-D. Philippe were no longer considered as pertaining to sexuality and thus escaped the moral framework of marriage, exclusivity, fidelity, openness to fertility, etc. It can be observed that M.-D. Philippe deviates from traditional Catholic doctrine precisely to facilitate, consciously or not, spiritual and sexual abuses. Parts of his intellectual construct more or less directly support his ascendancy over individuals and his concealed sexual practices. One could perhaps speak of a cycle between deviant actions and deviant doctrinal considerations: actions influence thought, and this thought in return makes practices acceptable.

Today, the link between the structural dimension of abuse within the Family of Saint John and aspects of the intellectual and spiritual formation given by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe appears more evident. It's not that all those who received this formation systematically – or even predominantly – became sexual abusers, but it inclined some to adopt principles from this teaching that could legitimize abusive behaviors. The cycle connecting actions and beliefs was passed on to others, turning them from disciples to participants.

Since the first communal realization of a link between the teachings of Father M.-D. Philippe and abusive behaviors about a decade ago¹, a gradual distancing has been undertaken. This process has already resulted in no longer making his teachings the reference for the formation of the brothers and sisters of Saint John. This radical change was achieved through critical examination of his thought, benefiting from the work of brothers and sisters, but also many external contributions. The immense importance of these external inputs must be emphasized, as they allowed for a departure from the self-referential nature characteristic of Father M.-D. Philippe's thought.

¹ 'A commission will be convened by the Master of Studies to identify any philosophical or theological errors that may be transmitted regarding chastity in our Congregation' (*Épreuves et espérance [Challenges and hope]*, General Chapter of the Brothers of Saint John, April 2013, GACSJ).

C. Psychology and Systemics

The psychological and systemic aspect focused on the personality of Father Marie-Dominique Philippe on one hand, and on the systemic dimension of abuse within the Family of Saint John on the other. These two subjects of study are intertwined, as the spread of sexual abuse is a direct result of the moral disorders and misguided beliefs of the founder, of which the Eau Vive case had already exposed certain facets. Marie-Dominique Philippe himself was involved in this case, which was notably marked by a familial dimension, and where his relationship with Father Dehau had elements of control and ascendancy. Unaware of this controlling dimension and its role in shaping his personality, he replicated the same type of relationship with many individuals. Some of these individuals, in turn, mirrored this pattern of spiritual abuse, which in many instances escalated to sexual abuse. This represents a form of 'generational transmission', creating what could be termed a 'cascade of influences'.

Furthermore, processes of construction and deconstruction were intertwined in the genesis of the Family of Saint John. Chapter IV of the psychological and systemic study particularly highlighted the role played by a set of dehumanizing beliefs held by Father Marie-Dominique, leading to community dysfunctions, with the gravest being sexual abuse.

Adding to these painful dysfunctions, the Family of Saint John faced the trauma of the revelation of sexual abuses by the founder, by Alix Parmentier, and numerous brothers. The authors of the psychological section are therapists, and their respective studies aim, in part, at the healing of the Family of Saint John. The goal was to understand what transpired, to articulate the wounds, not to condemn and shut down any future prospects, but rather to gain freedom. The aim is for the communities of brothers and sisters to increasingly become places of life and humanization, not only for their members but also for those they serve. Being aware of the darkest aspects of the history of the Family of Saint John, the authors also emphasized its life-giving strengths, notably: a simple and joyful fraternal charity, a zeal for truth-seeking, and apostolic enthusiasm. Though these strengths may have been misdirected, they remain resources for rebuilding, as evidenced by the ongoing journey of conversion.

D. Report Extensions

This study reveals that the core issue, common to both the Eau Vive case and the abuses within the Family of Saint John, is that of spiritual abuse. It is because of manipulation and control over consciences that so many sexual abuses occurred. The fight and prevention against these abuses thus demand that respect for individual judgment and decision-making be a personal choice and a community policy. By renouncing any dominance over another's spiritual intimacy, does man not resemble God, who respects the conscience and freedom of all? God's fatherhood is chaste¹, liberating; it should inspire all forms of fatherhood², and especially in this context, spiritual fatherhood. This is even more pertinent in an era marked by a crisis of fatherhood, often leaving the search for a father figure unfulfilled, making many vulnerable to an abusive paternal figure, as our study indicates. The perversion of fatherhood³ is the recurring theme in a story that spans over a century, from Father Dehau's ascendancy over his nephew Marie-Dominique to that of members of the Family of Saint John over those who trusted them. These individuals were wounded in both soul and body by religious figures who betrayed their vows and mission. In addition to the injuries stemming from the abuse itself, many victims have sustained further harm. Notably, there were wounds inflicted by the institution, which often failed to provide the necessary listening and care.

¹ 'God Himself loved man with a chaste love, allowing him the freedom even to err and turn against Him. The logic of love is always a logic of freedom' (Pope Francis, *Lettre apostolique Patris corde [Apostolic Letter 'Patris Corde']*, December 8, 2020, n° 7).

² Cf. Eph 3, 14–15: 'For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom all fatherhood in Heaven and on Earth derives its name.'

³ One can also speak of a perverted motherhood, for instance in the case of abusive spiritual motherhood, but it fundamentally revolves around the same mechanism of dominance and seeking omnipotence over another.

The victim was frequently seen as an inconvenient issue, when in reality, they were a suffering individual seeking understanding, justice, and often driven by the desire that others not endure similar pain.

The Congregation of the Brothers of Saint John, as an institution where numerous members committed abuses and which did not adequately respond to known abuse cases, is deeply committed to a process of reparation and forgiveness towards the victims¹. However, it's essential to differentiate between the institution as a whole and each individual member of this institution.

It's worth noting here that the vast majority of the brothers did not commit sexual abuse. Today, for many, the feeling of having been deceived by a founder they trusted with the generosity of their youth – like countless others, especially among the highest authorities of the Church – is compounded by the consequences of his grave misdeeds and those of other brothers, including the disgrace and generalizations (akin, for instance, to those faced by diocesan priests regarding pedophilia accusations). While the incomparable primary victims are those who have endured abuse, around them, like concentric circles, are individuals affected and in pain². Though it's incomparable to the essential support of the victims, these others too need listening, understanding, and support in their hope for the future.

E. Conclusion

'The truth will set you free'³: this saying of Christ, as reported by the evangelist Saint John, gives meaning to this study which, let's reiterate, is primarily intended for the Family of Saint John. The pursuit of historical truth should allow for a more discerning view of the past in all its complexity, to live the present in spiritual freedom and relinquish what hinders it. The critical evaluation of the intellectual and spiritual formation provided by Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, discerning the true from the false with care, allows one to view this formation with more detachment and be freed from what was accepted as authoritative. Lastly, psychological and systemic reflection liberates by raising awareness of relational dysfunctions and pointing out ways to overcome them. May the brothers and sisters of the Family of Saint John grow in this freedom rooted in truth, for themselves and for all those they are sent to.

This report won't be the final word on the abuses in the Family of Saint John and their connection to the Eau Vive case. It's a specific contribution, crafted within a defined framework, inherently limited. It pertains to a vast field of study, many aspects of which extend beyond the sole scope of religious communities founded by Marie-Dominique Philippe under the patronage of Saint John. We can only hope that researchers from various disciplines will, in turn, offer new studies. The past twenty years have indeed shown that any in-depth work on the issue of abuse, based on the testimonies of victims, can only help in curbing this lethal scourge.

We'll conclude by summarizing the three ultimate goals of this work:

- To bring justice to the victims, shedding more light on the terrible harm they've endured.

¹ The Congregation of the Brothers of Saint John signed an agreement with the Recognition and Reparation Commission (CRR) mandated by the CORREF for victims of abuse committed by religious brothers and sisters. Cf. <https://www.reconnaissancereparation.org> A commission was appointed by the Prior General of the Brothers of Saint John, at the request of the General Chapter, to prepare a ceremony seeking forgiveness from the victims of abuse committed by the brothers. This commission is advised by Isabelle Chartier-Siben, a physician, psychotherapist, and victimologist.

² Karlijn Demasure and Patrick Degriek refer to the abused as 'primary' victims, bearing the heavy aftermath. They term the loved ones of these victims as 'secondary' victims, who might deeply feel the harm done to a child, a sibling, a spouse, etc. The 'tertiary' victims are parishes, communities, etc., deeply affected by the wrongful acts of one of their own (under the direction of S. JOULAIN, K. DEMASURE, J.-G. NADEAU, *L'Église déchirée : comprendre et traverser la crise des agressions sexuelles sur mineurs [The Torn Church: Understanding and Navigating the Crisis of Child Sexual Assault]*, Paris, Bayard, 2021, chap. 2). In the case of the Family of Saint John, the situation is even more intricate, given that some, without being victims of sexual abuse, suffered from spiritual abuse and manipulation.

³ Jn 8, 32.

- To help everyone better understand what transpired, aiming to make life choices with greater freedom.
- To put an end to an excess that spanned many years, so that others aren't deceived and betrayed in their trust by manipulations of the Gospel.

The report's authors

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