

The Vocation of the Community of Saint John

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Lettre aux Amis, December 2000

(translated into English from the original)

I

Fribourg, April 1978

On April 24, 1978, Father Marie Dominique Philippe exhorted the future brothers of the Community of St. John to live the search for truth midst a great fraternal charity within the privileged context of religious life which includes prayer in common — silent contemplative prayer and liturgical offices. He also stressed the importance of continuing their philosophical formation during their years of theological studies. In fact, someone had previously suggested to him that he send the French students back to France in order to study theology. He simply answered, "One does not learn philosophy in two years, not even in three. While studying theology, one must continue one's philosophical research because, as it is well known, to be a great theologian one must continue sharpening one's intelligence." He also said, addressing the future brothers: "The Demon will find thirty-six ways of discouraging us or of giving us good excuses; we must be courageous and constantly renew ourselves in courage by staying close to Mary's heart.

"Fraternal charity must also help us. A certain type of life is needed for entering into speculative studies otherwise things are very difficult. It is necessary and important to help and encourage one another because one of the first aims of your time at Fribourg is to enter into these speculative studies. You must understand that there is no risk of going too far in the formation your intelligence, especially if it is a realistic formation. Intellectualising things would be very bad because one could lose contact with reality; but there is no danger if one keeps the contact with reality. If, during the time of our studies, we have truly made an honest effort to form our intelligence and enter into the thoughts of Saint Thomas, Saint Augustine, and the Fathers of the Church, we will become an oasis for all those who need us. We must form our intelligence and our hearts in order to be a little oasis in today's Church and for today's humanity. Fraternal charity must also help us in our effort of purifying our intelligence and offering it to God."

The next day, Fr Marie Dominique Philippe gathered the young men together again and read them a letter that he had just received from Monsignor Huot, an expert in canon law from Canada who watched over the beginnings of the Community. The letter was dated April 24:

"Very dear Father,

Gaudiam magnum nuntio vobis: I bring you good news of a great joy. Divine Providence, which disposes everything with love and order, has so willed that the Community of St. John receive the desired approbation. To this end, the Sacred Congregation has given its assent; it only remains to await the document which will ratify the concession. *Deo Gratias et Mariae.*

Not wanting to do anything that might upset things as studies were developing, I left the ripening fruit to the care of the Most Blessed Virgin and time. *In tempore oportuno*, indeed at the right time, a ripe fruit has fallen onto the plate! I tried getting a hold of you Wednesday, Thursday, and again this morning, but to no avail. I telephoned at all hours of the day and night, but you were probably away, unless you have changed your telephone number. The decree will be signed Monday or Tuesday at Monsignor Mayer's residence because he has to leave Wednesday. I am not sure when it will arrive at Lerins and at Fribourg because the Most Revd. Fr. Kleiner is in America, I am told, until the end of the month.

It would be a good idea not to speak of these things with anyone outside the Community until you have the paperwork in your hands so as to avoid any possible interference which might cause clauses in the document to be modified at the last moment. *In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras.*

Please pray for me, dear Father, and if you would, ask the members of the "holy" Community of St John to say a Hail Mary for me, begging the Blessed Virgin the grace that I may never want or do anything contrary to God's will. *Totus Tuus in Cristo et Maria.*"

II

"If God wanted the Community of St John to come into being..."

Since its foundation, Fr Philippe, who never had the intention founding a religious community, has often wondered why the Community of St John exists in the Church. In an essay written in 1986, but never published, he wrote:

Why the Community of St John exists in today's church is surely an important question. It leaves us stammering and hesitating, for we can only respond by a prudence enlightened by faith.

This much is certain, the Community of St John was born in response to the urgent and clear demand from five students in philosophy and theology at Fribourg. They wished to continue their spiritual formation in the form of a Christian community, totally given to Jesus, through Mary, in the environment of demanding contemplative love and fraternal charity.

While preaching a retreat at Chateauneuf de Galaure, I had the opportunity to ask Marthe Robin to pray for this intention. After a few minutes of silence, she said to me, very imperatively, "Father, you must respond to their request, it is a calling from the Holy Spirit." In my heart, I accepted everything from that moment, fully aware of all the difficulties that realising such a community could imply, but I was sure that if the Holy Spirit wanted it, He Himself would be there.

The Community of St John was not born, therefore, as a result of a long reflective process but out of the request of several young men who wished to give themselves to God. It was born out of a request of the Holy Spirit and a response to that request from hearts who wished to remain in obedience to Him.

This new religious family is first and foremost a community where the members search to live a true contemplative life following in the footsteps of the Beloved Disciple, John. He is the contemplative who, under the breath of the Paraclete, placed his intelligence at the service of his love for Jesus, the Immolated Lamb, in order to contemplate Him and in Him, to contemplate the Father. He thus became the faithful witness entirely dedicated to the service of the Church.

This contemplative life must be nourished by an intellectual formation which is especially strong and which becomes a fundamental and active purification of our intelligence and our imagination. This philosophical, intellectual formation will also be a way of responding to the desires of the Second Vatican Council: an overture to the world, that is to say, knowing modern man who is so easily manipulated by atheistic ideologies.

As for the theological formation, it will prepare those who are able and who have the desire, for the priesthood. At least, this is so if the Superiors judge that it is a good and useful thing for the Church.

Father Philippe has developed this theme several times and continues to do so, in his teaching and preaching to the brothers and sisters. We have gathered some extracts and grouped them by theme. They shall help us as we seek to faithfully live out our vocation according to the demands of the Holy Spirit.

III The Search for Truth

If God created the little Community of St John, it was for the search of the truth.

2000

If the Community of St John exists in the Church, it is to listen, as did St John, to the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, so that Jesus' word might shine forth in our hearts and lead us to the fullness of truth.

1996

It is necessary to continually revisit this aspect of our vocation, which is, I believe, *essential to the vocation of the community: in everything, we search for the truth.* Why does the Community of St John exist? Now and again we can ask ourselves this question, especially this year when all of us should be trying to have a greater awareness of this aspect in the face of the Church. It is what the Church is asking of us. This examination of conscience must be very loyal and true because all of us ought to be unanimous on this point. And, if there are those among us who are not, they are obliged to recognise that they are not in line with the Community's vocation.

I believe that from the very beginning the search for truth was present. While I was with Marthe Robin, it was already very clear. She had a very keen sense of the three wisdoms and she considered them as being very important for us as well as for the Foyers of Charity. She believed that the search for each wisdom, philosophical, theological, and mystical, was necessary whatever the cost.

Searching for the truth is not easy and in fact, it is even very difficult at times. So easily we have our own ideas, ideas about the Community of St John. Having one's own ideas about the Community and desiring to impose this idea upon other is, by the same fact, putting oneself outside of God's will.

The Holy Spirit has a different way of acting, a more profound way, a subterranean way. He asks us to keep going forward without knowing what is ahead. He indicates a direction, as he did for St John the Baptist. St. John the Baptist was given a certain direction in his life, but the Holy Spirit did not tell him what he should do. I believe that the Holy Spirit leads us in exactly the same way. When we have too many determined ideas, God very often causes the exact opposite to happen in order to show us that we must be poor in spirit.

Searching for the truth entails poverty — we do not possess the truth, we do not possess wisdom. We ask for it and it is given to us by participation. That is to say, it is given to us in the measure that we ask for it, in the measure that our hearts constantly remain open to this thirst and we remain abandoned... just the opposite is true for the one who believes that he possesses the truth. We are always held in expectation of the truth which is given to us and we must always go deeper, because what we possess is nothing compared to what the Holy Spirit wants yet to communicate to us. This is especially true at the level of the three wisdoms. **1984**

I understand *why God created the Community of St John*. It was in order to respond to the question: "What is truth during this moment of crisis?" The Holy Spirit leads us in darkness and makes us understand things after the event. We must first adhere in silence and obscurity, and afterwards we understand. **1995**

IV The Three Wisdoms

Mary is not only *Sedes Sapientiae*, Seat of Wisdom, but *Mater Sapientiae*, Mother of Wisdom. At the Cross, she is given to John so that he might enter into this mystery of Wisdom. We must come to understand that *if God in His Providence, willed our Community to exist*, and did so with our acquiescence and our freely given liberty, and if He willed that the Community *have a spiritual bond with Saint John*, it is because the Community of St John ought to be *bound to wisdom*. We know this to be true, we wish to understand it better, and we especially desire to live it. **1984**

Faith demands from us a vision of wisdom, of contemplation...that is why the Community of St John exists. I was not aware of this at the beginning, I accepted what God was asking of me without knowing why. The things of God are always like this... **1992**

The Church has willed that we be called the Community of Saint John. I have never been anything but a John the Baptist, the one showing the way. The Church is the one who has confirmed us as the Community of Saint John. We are, therefore, those who live something of St John the Evangelist, and who live it fully and who accept, as a consequence, the greatest joys, the greatest struggles, and the greatest bond with the Cross of Christ. We do not have the right to diminish the force of the message which is given to us by Saint John...

It becomes more and more clear to me that *the reason Jesus has willed the existence of the Community of Saint John in the Church is so that a sound realistic philosophy, a metaphysics may be maintained.* This philosophy is necessary in order to show that the human intelligence is given to us so that we might discover the existence of God. We are also to show that *all the scientific theology of Saint Thomas ought to flourish into a mystical theology.* **1992**

The reason the Church has recognised a new, small religious family is so that we might be attentive to the Pope's wishes, notably with regards to metaphysics. **1990**

The Community of Saint John must enter into the three wisdoms. It has no other aim in the Church than maintaining these three wisdoms. Each one of us has his own way of maintaining it and sometimes we maintain it best by doing the cooking! But we should have a love for the truth, a love for philosophical wisdom, for theological wisdom, for mystical wisdom, for *all three wisdoms.*

Entering into these three wisdoms takes time. Inevitably there will be times when the Demon will be on the prowl because he detests the search for the truth, and wherever he discovers this search for truth, he attacks. (...) One has to have the *humility* to search for the truth. We must search for the pure truth, the truth in the fullest sense of the term; we search this truth throughout everything and more than anything. Evidently, there are different paths. There are great masters of the truth, such as Saint Thomas. As I have already said: whoever is opposed to Saint Thomas cannot be a part of the Community. He is our measure and he indicates to us the one who is the Philosopher. One day I understood the necessity of returning to the source, that is, to Aristotle. It was after reading Heidegger that this became clear to me. Quite often today we are unable to speak about Saint Thomas to all those we encounter while we can speak to them about philosophy. Aristotle helps us become intelligent and humble in the face of reality, he helps us respect reality...

Modern thought is primarily a negation and all of us are marked by this in so far as our first instinct is to criticise. Without even knowing what we are talking about, we criticise. We must rediscover an attitude of receptivity and intellectual humility, understanding that the truth is the good proper to the intelligence. Our intelligence will thus be able to be offered to God...

The offering of our intelligence to God is so necessary and *this offering is perhaps the grace of the Community.* From time to time, while I am before God, the question of what the Community should bring to the Church arises. *We must offer our intelligence to God* is the answer.

Mary offered her intelligence at the foot of the Cross and I believe that this is what we should also do. Saint John offered his intelligence at the foot of the Cross and he received the contemplation which he expressed in the Prologue of his Gospel. Contemplation of the Prologue can only enlighten us if our intelligence is totally offered to God.

A flawed intelligence cannot be offered to God...there's too much smoke! It is like Cain who offered fruits which were not exactly true. When our intelligence contains a flaw, when it is tainted by a Hegelian dialectic, it cannot not be offered to God...it clings too much to us, it is our possession and we are incapable of offering it. The intelligence needs to rediscover an objectivity in order to be able to be offered to God. This is where humility comes in... **1985**

I believe that we must understand more and more deeply that in today's world, *God is asking us for a testimony of poverty. We must live as the poor do, as workers of wisdom.*

If we are truly workers of Wisdom, workers of the three wisdoms, we are necessarily poor and are thus invited by Wisdom to her table. (cf Proverbs 9:1-6). This poverty is first and foremost interior. Interior poverty ought to be one of the most profound characteristics of our life and we must enter into it as deeply as possible. The fact that the Lord asks us to develop our intelligence, to become as intelligent as possible for Him according to our respective gifts, implies that this poverty be even greater than usual. Never must we consider ourselves as owners of the truth, nothing is more disagreeable than this and nothing goes more against the greatness of a soul. We do not possess the truth, it is truth which possesses us. In our world today, we should be especially careful not to give the impression that we possess the truth. We should be the smallest school, the school in the last place, the Benjamin, the school of Saint John. We should go forward in a very humble search for truth, without having any *a priori*, but with a very great love and desire for truth. We should not hold to the 'authorities' (living or dead), but search the truth in the school of the 'masters' (living and dead). We search for the truth and this is our sole honour. We love the truth, but we do not possess it. We are *beggars and labourers of truth.*
1984

Our fraternal charity must first and foremost be a source of light for those who live in darkness. It is not something we use in order to exalt ourselves, but rather it makes of us servants and those who try in every way possible to communicate the light that Jesus gives to them through faith and through philosophy. We see that all the errors of today's theology stem from a false philosophy, an ideology. And in seeing this, we come to understand the necessity of putting ourselves at the service of others. God asks us to do so. The Holy Father has made it clear to us and therefore we do this work in obedience.

The Holy Father once said to me: "*The Community of Saint John, while remaining poor in spirit, must be a source of light for the Church.*" We must insist upon this spirit of poverty very much because fraternal charity demands a great interior poverty. When it is not present, instead of being of service to one another, we become an irritation. Nothing is more irritating for men than a young theologian who thinks he possesses the truth! *The more Jesus gives us light, the poorer we must become* in order to live a true fraternal charity. That is to say, we must be of service to others, listening to them. Above all, we must listen.
1993

V

Contemplative life and the mystery of Compassion

The renewal of religious life in the heart of Mary must lead us to be faithful, poor and gentle servants who adore in spirit and in truth. Through adoration, religious life deepens in what is its most excellent fruit.

If one is a religious, it is in order to adore, to adore with Jesus Crucified. Being a religious means being a burnt offering of love.

The finality of one's vows is adoration in spirit and in truth. It is in this light that we must come to understand all the demands of the spirit of virginity, the spirit of poverty and the spirit of

obedience. We will then understand that religious life finds its source of renewal in being completely finalised by adoration. Each time you adore, you offer your life to God, you accept to die.

Each time you adore, you place your whole life, your whole soul into the hands of the Father. By this very fact, you are freed from all the conditioning in which you live. Adoration is the theology of liberation! In surpassing all the temporal and geographical conditioning, we rediscover our fundamental and true liberty, the one that comes from adoration and which places our lives in a loving surrounding. Adoration is the first love with regards to our God, our Creator. (...) Through adoration, religious life opens its doors to contemplation.

Our world is a world of immanence which no longer wants to consider the mystery of Creation. However, the mystery of Redemption cannot be viewed without first looking at the mystery of Creation. The world today cannot be saved unless it accepts to pass through the narrow door of adoration. The renewal of the Church must come *through adoration*. Religious life will thus rediscover its primordial signification, that of being 'professional' servants who adore. That is what religious life is.

In the monastic religious life, one is *alone* before God (we are monks). We search for this solitude and this desert because it is *our life*, it is the breath of our soul.

This adoration leads us to contemplation. Contemplation, which is a direct fruit of the *Redemption*, is a fruit proper to the Holy Spirit's gift of Wisdom. This Wisdom blossoms through contemplation: "Blessed are the peacemakers." There is a very profound link between adoration and contemplation; we do not enter into contemplation ("the peacemakers") unless we are first of all *completely and divinely abandoned through adoration*. This is the link between the mystery of Creation and the mystery of re-Creation, between the human person and the mystery of grace. It is through grace that we are able to contemplate. Grace is present in adoration, but it is in contemplation that it fully blossoms.

Adoration and contemplation must be held together very closely. It is through adoration that we enter into deeper prayer and contemplation. The renewal of monastic religious life should be entirely oriented toward this deeper prayer and contemplation. **1984**

The Community of Saint John exists in order to live the mystery of religious consecration in the heart of Mary, through and in the mystery of her Presentation in the Temple. **1983**

The Presentation of Mary being the beginning of all the divine economy concerning the Church makes us realise how much Marthe Robin had reason to say that religious life, in order to rediscover its strength and be renewed, needs to look once again at *Mary in the mystery of her consecration*. Without a doubt, the Holy Spirit calls us in a particular way to live the mystery of Mary's Presentation and thus be united to the Father in a very special way through Mary and thanks to her. My desire is that the spirit of our vows causes us to live united to the Father, to his mercy and that our vows may enable us to live with the Father in so far as He is source and not in so far as He is an authority. Being a source goes much deeper because an authority is always limited. We can ask anything and everything of a father... a father can even offer up his daughter as did Jephtha. Is not the offering that this father made of his daughter extraordinary? She rushed towards him and he was obliged to offer her... The Father offered Mary at the Cross, because He was able to ask *everything* of her. It was not an act of authority. Being able to ask everything of someone that we love goes much deeper... **1984**

One cannot be a brother of St John unless one is entirely and radically offered to Mary.

1988

Our life is a contemplative life. Contemplation is the profound intention of our life. The religious and monastic aspects are ordered toward this contemplation. Why? Because we are joined to Mary and Saint John, they were present at the Cross, and they lived the Cross in a contemplative way. This is the summit of all Christian life. We must not be afraid to affirm it, but we must affirm it in great poverty and littleness, in a very great humility. All of us fall short of what the Holy Spirit is asking of us, especially if He is asking us to live *contemplative life as did Mary at the Cross*. However, all of us must have a great desire to live this contemplation and all of us must strive towards living it. *That is what the Community of Saint John is*. We are not an intellectual community where the studies would be first. We are children of Christ and we desire to live Mary's Compassion with her. If we love searching for the truth, it is because we want to contemplate, we want to have a profound knowledge of St John's Gospel, and we want to offer our intelligence to Christ...but still this is not our aim. Our aim is to love, to contemplate, to *be united to Mary in her Compassion and live this mystery with her*. This is what gives meaning to our life.

1988

I believe that *the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit wished the Community of St John to exist in order to unite the monastic life and the apostolic life in a most profound way, in the light of Saint John*.

I will try to explain this better. The monastic dimension is religion in its strongest, most forceful thirst for contemplation. The Community of St John is thus a descendant of a monastic life ordered towards contemplation. It assumes all the demands of doctrine while remaining open to an apostolic life even though this may be difficult. Jesus could do it all through his plenitude of grace, but we are fragile and we do not have very much time...we would have to skip sleeping and dedicate our nights to monastic liturgy and our days to apostolic works!

1990

The Holy Spirit is calling us to live the mystery of the *faith* of Mary. Liturgy, the external manifestation of faith, is not the most important thing for us; true renewal comes from faith. Liturgical renewal cannot exist unless there is a renewal of faith. Faith requires contemplation and contemplation requires doctrine. In other words, the best thing that we can do in order to tend towards contemplation is to be attentive to the mystery which is revealed to us and to the Church's doctrine. Our effort thus consists in looking at the mysteries which are revealed to us in the most pure, clear way. *For the Community of St John, it is important to understand that this renewal happens through faith, through contemplation*.

Contemplation is given to us gratuitously and the Holy Spirit does not wish us to be lazy. I can therefore say that contemplation will be granted you in the measure that you thirst for truth, that you do all that you possibly can to put aside all your imaginings and any myths in order to fully enter into the mystery of Revelation. I am more and more convinced that this is what the Holy Spirit is asking the Community to do and therefore, it is what He is asking from each one of us. At the beginning I was not so sure of it...Marthe Robin did not directly mention it, but she did tell me to continue teaching philosophy at Fribourg even though I had expressed a desire to preach to contemplative nuns, to Carmelites. She answered me by saying that teaching philosophy was more useful to the Church and therefore, more useful for contemplation. Imagine a little peasant

girl saying that! Normally, a little peasant girl would very well understand that one might wish to preach to Carmelites, but not that one might teach philosophy! **1988**

If one does not understand that the divine motherhood of Mary is contemplative, and that it therefore reaches its fullness in the mystery of the Compassion, one understands nothing of what we are trying to live in the Community of St John. We try to live *the mystery of Mary and most especially, Mary in her Compassion*.

The mystery of Mary's Compassion allows us to grasp what is unique to the contemplative, religious monastic life. Mystical theology is the foundation of our everyday life. In our everyday life, there are many things that we are unable to understand unless we have a mystical vision. We can have a mystical theology without having understood metaphysics. This is why an understanding of metaphysics is not a requirement for a vocation to the Community, but mystical theology is. Those choosing to refuse a mystical theology will be unable to find their place in the Community of St John. When I say 'mystical' I mean a *personal* Christian life, a life of love, because as soon as it is personal, it is love — a life of personal intimacy with God beyond the framework of the Community.

This is why I often say that anyone who wants to persevere in this life has have a personal relationship with St John and live in the light of his fatherhood. This is done in love, with Mary. **1991**

Every Christian close to St John must know that the mystery of the Compassion, implying Mary's mediation, is for him. I believe that *the unique mission of the Community of St John is to constantly remind others of the demanding nature of the mystery of the Cross*. It is at the Cross that we become the beloved little ones of the Blessed Virgin Mary who offers us to Jesus as the fruit of her Compassion, as the most intimate fruit of the mystery of the Cross. This is a family secret because it is a secret between a mother and her child. Through this secret we come to understand the greatness of the Father's gesture through Jesus: '*Woman, behold your son*' and '*Behold your mother*'. These words are for us. At the moment of the Annunciation the Father spoke only to Mary. In the mystery of the divine motherhood of Mary at the Cross, the Holy Spirit speaks to John's heart and to our hearts, in so far as they are beloved disciples of John which desire to fully live everything he lived. Our hearts therefore receive these words of Jesus with the greatest possible love, knowing that these words: '*Behold your son*' and '*Behold your Mother*' express the mystery of Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces in the strongest possible way. We must jealously keep these words in our hearts so as to dwell in profound unity with the Holy Virgin. **1999**

Mary Magdalene also helps us understand a great deal, that is why St John speaks to us about her. I believe he understood the great purification of her heart that occurred through the mystery of the Tomb. Of course, he kept silent about it, but he understood because he lived it. It is for this reason that John is asking for *this little family closely tied to his heart*. *He wants us to live these mysteries which have not yet been fully lived in the Church*. If we are the Benjamins, the little ones, we have to live this mystery of the Tomb. It is hard, very hard even, but very great. **1984**

Through our religious life we are called to live the royal priesthood of believers, the royal priesthood of the Woman, Mary. Our religious life binds us to Mary in a very unique way. Jesus

will ask several brothers to receive the ministerial priesthood. Those who are asked will receive it in obedience and will have to be very attentive to the demands of their studies. However, this calling is not the most important. What is primarily important is having a heart which resembles Jesus' heart, a heart that is burning with love, burning with mercy, and that acts with great prudence (acquired and infused) so as not to lead Jesus' sheep astray, along false and erroneous paths. (Prudence, although indispensable, is not what comes first.) The love which unites us to the heart of Jesus and to the heart of Mary is what is the most important...

Mary was given to St John, the priest, in order to exercise beside him her divine motherhood, the motherhood of fraternal charity, so that John could entrust himself to her and fully live the instrumental power which is the ministerial priesthood. We should ask that Mary be given to each one of our priests, that she be the Mother of their priesthood. She does not give them the priesthood, but it is necessary that she be the Mother of their priesthood in order that it might be exercised in a totally divine way...

We are the priests of Jesus, but we are also priests of Mary. Her first lesson (for all those who are consecrated to God, priests or not) is to introduce us into silent contemplative prayer, into a thirst for contemplation; it is to *render present in our hearts Christ's cry of thirst and cause us to live this cry as an imperative call of Christ upon us*. Mary maintains in us a desire and a thirst for contemplation even through the times of aridity; thus our thirst for the beatific vision. This is the very first grace that she gives and wants to give her consecrated children. We must be firmly convinced *that we cannot be a part of the Community of Saint John without this thirsting for contemplation and without doing all that we can in order to live within this contemplation*.

1985

The direct fruit of the priesthood of Christ is our introduction into the mystery of His relationship with the Father, His filiation. His priesthood also allows this mystery of filiation to take possession of what is most intimate in us through the very mystery of grace. In taking possession of us, it demands that we be priests for the entire Mystical Body and for all of humanity, following in Christ's footsteps. *In the measure that we are sons, we are priests*. How important it is that we understand this! In the measure that we are sons, we are priests, since the priesthood of Christ is the priesthood of the Beloved Son. Thus, we can only live Christ's priesthood in the measure that we are beloved sons, beloved children of the Father.

Only through silent prayer can we live this filiation. The mystery of silent prayer is to discover, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we live this filiation, that it is given to us, and that it is our life at its most intimate and profound level. *It is therefore through silent prayer that we live this mystical, royal priesthood, the priesthood of Christ*. The ministerial priesthood is given superabundantly to those who are called to receive it. It contributes to the growth of their holiness and thus the growth of their filiation and their mystical priesthood. The exercise of the ministerial priesthood, its effectiveness, is directly dependent upon our life of silent prayer. This helps us to understand why the Community of St John exists, willed by God and confirmed by the Church. It exists in order that the ministerial priesthood might be a contemplative priesthood and not one that is caught up in a need to be efficient. The ministerial priesthood exists *for* the royal priesthood of believers which is directly linked to the divine filiation. This filiation means living what Jesus lived, it is *substantially the same filiation*.

In understanding this, one can no longer oppose monastic and apostolic life. We must have an interior conviction of this truth in order to be able to enlighten those who consider the ministerial priesthood as nothing more than a function, a job. If it were a job, the monastic life would indeed be in opposition to it. But the reality is quite different. We must come to understand that the

monastic life allows the full development of all the potential of the ministerial priesthood which tends toward being a priesthood *completely dependent upon filiation and ordered to filiation*.
1988

The greatest joy of Mary's heart was living the glory of her Beloved Son's priestly heart, and this should be our greatest joy also. As much as possible, we must try to live this joy which is the ultimate moment of Jesus' priesthood, with her, through her, and in her. There is no other priesthood than the one of Jesus. His is the priesthood *par excellence*, the one that asks to be lived eternally within the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is very important for us to understand *this secret which must be at the heart of the Community of Saint John*. We must receive this secret as the one that Mary wants to give to us and we should pass it on to others whenever possible. This secret must be lived out in us so that we might be able to live to the very end everything that the love of Jesus' heart demands from each one of us.
1984

To pray is to enter through the narrow door into the mystery of the Father; it is to discover, through all that Jesus says to us in the Gospel, that intimacy, that divine and eternal silence, that attraction which the Father had and still has upon his Beloved Son. Jesus desires to give us this attraction in order to enable us to understand more and more deeply his calling upon us. *If He has led us to the Community of St John, it is to communicate to us the secrets of his intimacy with the Father and make us understand that these secrets of love are given to us*. All of St John's Gospel leads us to this. We need to show some holy audacity, we must not stop at the door like unworthy servants, keeping their distance and saying, 'This is not for us, this is only for privileged souls!' Does St John not reveal to us these secrets? The prayer of the Beloved Son to His Father is given to us; it is the fruit of the most sublime and simple contemplation, the one of the Beloved Son. The entire mystery of prayer remains a mystery of the Trinitarian family. It is the gaze of the Beloved Son upon His Father. The Beloved Son attracts us and introduces us into this extraordinary intimacy because it is *for us* and it is given to us. This is the secret of the Beloved Son. It requires silence and allows us to gaze upon the Father from the 'inside' (this is characteristic of a secret). No longer do we look at the Father from the outside; we look at him as someone who comes down to our level in order to help us live in intimacy with him, so as to give us everything and allow us to call him 'Father'. Through and in the Son, we live this secret.
1996

In the Community of St John, we should not ask for charismatic gifts of the Spirit, *we should ask for contemplation*. We can never ask for it enough. *Ask for adoration, prayer and contemplation*.
1984

The characteristic proper to our vocation is to love without measure; that is the measure of Jesus. A church must *go to the very end of love's demands* and I believe that this is *what the Community of St John is in the Church: the Church of Ephesus*.
1993

VI Vir Evangelicus: People of the Gospel

The **first moment** of the ‘high priestly’ prayer of Jesus in Chapter 17 of St John’s Gospel is the thirst of the Son, his desire before the Father: “*Father the hour has come! Glorify your son, that your son may glorify you.*”

The **second moment** expresses everything that our apostolic and evangelical life should be: “*I have manifested your name to the men that you have given me out of the world. They were yours, and you have given them to me, and they have kept your word.*”

Our only role is this: “*I have manifested your name...*” This is true for everyone in the Community. The Contemplative sisters, the Apostolic sisters, and the Marian sisters must live in a profound unity and manifest the Name of Jesus and the Name of the Father through their faithfulness. The testimony of these sisters (and of our brothers who are oblates and closely linked to our contemplative sisters since they live in silence) is one that must necessarily be realised in a great faithfulness to the Father’s attraction and in a very deep, profound love.

Our brothers, in their apostolic activity, must live in truth in order to be entirely given to the Father and fully accomplish His will. “*Now they have learned that whatever you have given me is from you; because the words that you have given me I have given to them. And they have received them, and have known of a truth that I came forth from you, and they have believed that you did send me.*” We must constantly remind others that Jesus is the Beloved Son of the Father, the Envoy *par excellence*: “*Philip, he who sees me sees also the Father.*”

“*I pray for them; not for the world do I pray, but for those who you have given me, because they are yours; and all things that are mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I am glorified in them.*” Here is our *ordo caritatis*: those whom we must love the most are our brothers and sisters, those close to us. Our sisters must love Jesus, and with him, their brothers, and with their brothers all those who are called by the Father. There is an order in charity. We must come to understand that what is greatest in us is the fact of being *vir evangelicus* (a man of the gospel), that is to say, an envoy of the Father.

You will truly be *vir evangelicus* if in all that you do and all that you say during your life, you are *ones sent by the Father* and if the greatest light for you is this thought: *Am I doing this as one who is sent by the Father? If not, then it is not a part of my mission, it is not my vocation.* Your evening examination is thus given to you: “Everything that I did today, was it really what the envoy *par excellence* of the Father does?” This question is very demanding because we no longer have a name, we are an envoy. Does it ever occur to you to say “an envoy of the Father”? Usually you immediately say your name — the Community of St John...but no, you are ones sent by the Father. Of course, if we keep saying this, people will start telling us: “that is all well and good, but all apostles are envoys of the Father.” And surely, they all should be. The Community of St John *is* an envoy of the Father; we could even say that being an envoy of the Father is the only thing that gives being and sense to the Community. **1999**

In the Community of Saint John, a retreat is a time for increasing your thirst for God, your desire to be contemplative, and a time for entering into a profound intimacy with Jesus. I hope that your

theology will become *a true wisdom that helps you contemplate* and not just an erudition or a science. The world and the Church need a theology which helps people to contemplate. All of us have our flaws and we are all far from being perfect, but we must be men of God: *vir evangelicus*, as was St Dominic. We must be men entirely turned towards Christ who have an intense love for Mary in their hearts and enter into this great intimacy with Jesus. If there is this true supernatural love, everything else will become tolerable. If you are men of God, people will love you. If not, people will say: “Sure, they are intelligent and its wonderful to speak with them, but they are too superficial, they believe they are intelligent”... and you will not be able to do the good that you must do. You will not be the men that you must be for the Church. **2000**

We do not speak of St Dominic as a contemplative or even an apostle, rather we speak of him as *vir evangelicus*. That is to say, *a man entirely relative to Christ* as Mary was entirely relative to Him. And this is *truly how our lives should be* — completely relative to Jesus in our desire for contemplation, in our silent prayer, in our adoration, adoring with Him, through Him and in Him. We must be evangelical men through and through. Thus the problem of maintaining an equilibrium between the contemplative “part” of our life and the part of testimony, the apostolic life, will no longer cause difficulties for the superiors. For the evangelical man, the contemplative part is not a part, it is everything!

The distinction made between contemplative life and active life comes about through an analysis. It is a theory and not a practicality. One is given to Christ. Our grace enables us to live in Christ, to love Him, and causes us to be paupers. *Having nothing so as to be completely given over to Christ*, that is what the Paraclete realises in our lives. His mission is to make us evangelical men, *vir evangelicus*. **2000**

VII Fraternal Charity

*The one thing that St John is asking of us...*the great secret that he wishes to place in our hearts is proclaimed in the Apocalypse, in his Gospel, and his first letter: “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” In chapter 15 of his Gospel, he shows us that the fecundity of the Church is the fraternal charity which glorifies the Father and gives witness to the absoluteness of love. Therefore, what Saint John desires to establish among us is an overflowing fraternal charity which has its source in the Eucharist and the heart of Mary. We can only live this fraternal charity if this dual alliance between the Eucharist and the heart of Mary is present for us. Of all the things that our father St John desires for us, fraternal charity must be the ultimate fruit. He lived fraternal charity in a most extraordinary way thanks to Mary and to the Eucharist. **1990**

In the Community of St John, what Mary is asking of us first and foremost in the exercise of our fraternal charity is to understand the link between fraternal charity and the contemplation of her mystery of Compassion. Our contemplation should be sustained by the mystery of her Compassion...the link between fraternal charity and the mystery of Mary’s Compassion should show itself in a practical way in our lives through an ever more acute sense of our responsibility towards our brothers. (...) The special mark of the Community of St John is to affirm the

exercise of fraternal charity as an integral part of our royal priesthood, linked to that of Mary in the mystery of her Compassion, in her mystery of motherhood of St John. **1984**

VIII Three Alliances

Let us never forget that if Jesus called the Community of St John into being, it was in order that we might *live the alliance with Mary, safeguard the mystery of the Eucharist in all its strength, and love Peter as did St John* and carry him in our heart.

Our father St John desires that there be a very strong and intimate bond between our hearts and the heart of the one who is the successor of St Peter. The more perfidious and violent the attacks against him become, the more we should love him, pray for him, and carry him in our hearts as St John carried Peter in his heart with so much love. John never judged Peter. The more aware of the struggles he became, the more he loved Peter and the more he kept him in his heart and in his prayer. Each time that we hear of attacks against the one Christ has given us as the successor of Peter, we are wounded in the inmost depths of our hearts and we would love to be able to defend him in battle!...However, Mary helps us to understand that that is not how we should defend him. We defend him by loving him more, loving him with an ever greater fidelity, loving him like our father St John loved Peter. **1990**

We should constantly come back to these alliances which are given to us in the Gospel of St John. Through these three alliances, St John gradually exercises upon us his fatherhood. Our effort consists in trying to understand that our monastic life is Christian life lived in its absolute. It is not something different from Christian life; that is why monastic life is open to the People of God. The People of God should feel 'at home' with us. Anything that is profoundly Christian is monastic.

We are not fully beloved sons of John unless we live these three alliances — they are the Johannine inheritance. St John's fatherhood causes us to live these alliances in the most profound way. All of us have the desire to live under his fatherhood and we should do so with our hearts and our intelligence. Living with our hearts means constantly coming back to the alliance in the Eucharist, the alliance with Mary, and the alliance with Peter. This is our life. Whenever anyone asks you what characterises the Community of St John tell them that *our life is one that wishes to be fully Christian, lived out according to the three alliances revealed to us by St John. It is a monastic life that hopes to live in the presence of Mary, to flourish midst fraternal charity, and to be apostolic.*

Our apostolic life does not determine our Christian life. Our Christian life is determined by our love for Christ through and in the Eucharist, with and in Mary, and with Peter. **1995**

IX
“If I wish him to remain until I come...”

“Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”
(Jn 17:3)

Let us seek to truly understand that life is *“to know you, the only true God.”*

In order to know God, our love for him must be intense. We love him, but in order to love him more we must come to know him and place all of our intelligence at the service of our love. *Perhaps God has willed the existence of the Community of St John for this reason.* Jesus said, *“If I wish him to remain until I come...”* In other words, Jesus desires *that the spirit of St John remain until his second coming.* The spirit of St John is that of the beloved disciple, the one who believes that everything Jesus lived is *his* life. John had no other life than the one of Jesus. His one desire on earth was to live this eternal life and understand that that meant *“knowing you, the only true God.”*

Therefore we must ask ourselves: *“Do we have this thirst to know God?”* Do we try to know him at the philosophical level? We do not have the right to say that philosophy is 'not for me.' No, it is for each one of us, respecting our particular state in life. We therefore seek to know God according to philosophical, theological, and mystical wisdom following in the footsteps of the little St Therese. On the day of her death she said that she had searched for the truth all her life — that is very Johannine: *“to know you, the only true God.”* All our knowledge is ordered toward knowing God. **1993**

Since we are called to live what St John lived and since, at the end of this 20th century, we are called to be for Christ what St John was, should we not try and understand that the Community was born in order to live out Jesus' desire: *“If I wish him to remain until I come...”*? Love these words very much and keep them in your hearts and you will come to understand many things through them. Receive them directly from the Holy Spirit and from Jesus as words which are true for each one of you, true for all of us. If we live on these words, John's silence on the mystery of the Assumption is for us. This silence of John which is a part of his fatherhood upon us, is given to us so that we might be able to be intimately united to Mary and believe more deeply in the effects of her love on us, in her predilection for us. St John's secret must educate us so as to allow Mary to exercise upon us a glorious motherhood, ever more profound and perfect. **1991**

All around us and in us, we see how great the struggle is and we see that we are weak, fragile, and no more intelligent or courageous than others. Yet, we have the audacity to say, proclaim even (and we should!) that St John is our father and that we wish to be like him, to be close to him, and we desire to live all that he lived. We have a great desire to be at the Last Supper close to Jesus' heart, to be faithful at the Cross and to receive Mary. We want to know what he experienced at Jesus' Tomb and we long to dwell, as he did, close to the Lamb and receive the incredible light that was shed upon the Church and her struggles. We would love to live everything he did! We want to be Christ's joy and the realisation of his desire: *“If I want him to remain until I come...”* We want to keep alive, for us and for the Church today, what St John was for Christ. John was the faithful and beloved disciple upon whom Jesus could rely, not because of his strength or because of his intelligence — even though he had both of these, but because of his faithfulness.

He was not faithful because of his strength and his intelligence, but because of the precious graces that Jesus bestowed on him — love, tenderness and strength. **1990**

I believe that *the Community of St John exists in the Church in order to live under the fatherhood of St John* and this fatherhood, yes, even the very mystery of St John, requires *a profound search for the truth, a purity of heart and a great youthfulness* (that is to say, the flexibility of youthfulness). These are the three qualities of St John that St Thomas brought to light when he asked himself why Jesus confided Mary to John and not to Peter. These three reasons — perspicacity of intelligence (it is our thirst for truth which renders us intelligent), purity of heart, and youthfulness, affect the theological virtues in their exercise. St John's fatherhood works in a triple way in order that we might be ever more docile to Jesus' calling: *"Go, sell everything that you have..."* We wish to leave everything in order to be able to follow Jesus and love him. In leaving everything, we show him how much we love him and how much his love is capable of separating us from all that is not *Him* in order to only be concerned with pleasing Him. There is a great absolute in this vocation of St John.

The Holy Spirit has brought into being a new religious family closely tied to St John in order that there may be a family close to Jesus, living what St John lived with Jesus. *"If I want him to remain until I come..."* The spirit of St John must remain until Christ's return and *the Holy Spirit has given birth to a family under the fatherhood of St John so that his spirit continue to be present in the Church*. This spirit of St John includes a thirst for truth and a very great love for God and for one's neighbour because fraternal charity is the ultimate precept and it needs to be overflowing. All of this must be lived in a great youthfulness, meaning that, it must be lived in a great flexibility, in a great *élan* of love. May we never withdraw into ourselves, but on the contrary, may we always seek to go further in light and in love.

The closer we come to the end, that is to say, to Christ's return, the more we must live in this great *élan* which is the virtue of hope. We must hold onto this great strength which is victorious over everything because the closer the end is, the greater the struggle is (this is very clear in the book of Revelation). I am right when I say "is greater" and not "will be greater" because we know and can feel that the struggle is there, raging. However, we must enter the battle with lightweight weapons, those of the Gospel, which will allow us to move more quickly.

The consecration to Jesus of all that we are and all that we have allows our fraternal charity to fully blossom. It awakens the sense of our responsibility towards Christ, thus making of the family of St John a family that glorifies the Father by glorifying Jesus. **1995**

The Resurrection always raises many questions. It is so human and yet, so divine! It is fully human —we experience joy — and fully divine — it is completely beyond us, of another world...

Having risen, Jesus came to be among us throughout several apparitions and yet, was not of this world. He ended these apparitions with a desire: *"If I wish him to remain until I come, what is it to you? Follow me."* What is really extraordinary is to place the two desires of Jesus in parallel, one expressed at his Crucifixion, the other after his Resurrection: *"I thirst"*— *"If I wish him to remain..."*. They are completely different. The first is given to the whole Church and is for all of humanity (even if humanity misunderstands it, even if the holy women mistook it for a human desire of thirst) and the second was expressed to Peter alone. After his resurrection, Jesus shows that Peter's grace is to follow him, and that John's grace is unique: *"If I wish him to remain until I come..."*

I believe that the Community of St John is the response to the second desire of Jesus. I am more and more convinced of it. We are here as a response to that desire which Jesus almost dared not to say, because it is so extraordinary. He was asking that the spirit of St John remain. I say spirit of St John because it is truly this that Jesus was asking of St John and of all the beloved disciples and friends of John. In order that this desire might be solidly established and made effective, it took shape in the form of a Community. Within this Community, the desire develops in different ways because it is very subtle and profound. Jesus expressed this desire to Peter; John heard it, and we are also able to hear it. It must take possession of our hearts. We need to respond to Jesus. We cannot let His desire, expressed in Galilee for us, go unanswered. **2000**

"Turning round, Peter saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved, the one who, at the supper, had leaned back upon his breast and said, 'Lord, who is it that will betray you?' Peter therefore, seeing him, said to Jesus, 'Lord, and what of this man?' Jesus said to him, 'If I wish him to remain until I come, what is it to you? You are to follow me.'" (Jn 21:20-22)

After having received his authority, this is the very first question that Peter asks. The way in which Jesus answers him is quite extraordinary. Saint John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote these words and he desires that we come to understand them in a spiritual way, and not as those who understood them in a material way: *"This saying therefore went abroad among the brethren, that that disciple was not to die. But Jesus had not said to him, 'He is not to die'; but rather, 'If I wish him to remain until I come, what is it to you?'"* Jesus was expressing the intimate desire of his heart. He ended his life on the Cross with the words *'I thirst'* and this *'I thirst'* contains a secret: *"If I want him to remain..."* Jesus sets forth a hypothesis: *"If..."*. (Between friends, there are not just orders, there are desires, and sometimes there are crazy desires which are expressed in a hypothetical way.) This is the only time that Jesus expresses a hypothetical desire. It is a desire which surpasses what would normally happen; it should not happen and at the same time, it has to happen. It is so completely ambiguous that no one understood it or they understood it in a material way. However, St John teaches us that these words of Jesus are something other than they appear. They contain a profound desire and express all of Jesus' love for St John. Love goes beyond any concrete realisation. It is the source of the most extraordinary, divine and real desires, even those which cannot not be realised. This type of desire does not come from the imagination. Jesus would have loved it if John could have remained forever... it is to be understood in a spiritual way — Jesus was expressing a very profound desire concerning John.

Being a beloved disciple of Jesus is everything. We could not wish for anything else. For some time now, I have been wondering *if the Community of St John is not the response to this profound desire of Christ's heart*. I had not thought of this when the Community was first founded — but the beginnings were so strange that in any case, I would not possibly have been able to imagine it. If I would have had a plan or an idea of the Community, everything would have been ruined. But I did not, I only responded to the wish of one of my students, Alain (Brother Marie Alain): "Will you prepare us for religious life and for the priesthood?"

In trying to deepen my knowledge of what God is asking of us, I have come to understand that the *Community of St John must be the response to the desire of Jesus: "If I wish him to remain until I come..."* And, in order to be beloved disciples, we must understand that *that is all* he is asking of us.

Our strength lies in our response to this hidden desire of the heart of Christ. Often we can be tempted to look at everything that is not going well, all the mistakes that are being made. It is true that there are many mistakes, but there are also many great things happening. For instance, the

response that we give to Jesus' desire from the depths of our hearts. This response is the intimate secret of our family. Not a single one of us is going to say, "I am a response to the desire of Christ." No one could say it. John never said it, he kept silent...even though it was something so great for him. How is it possible that he was able to write it in his Gospel? It is very mysterious and there is a strong link with Peter involved. The two of them have a strong and intimate bond. We should lovingly hold the authority of Peter in our hearts. This authority, which is expressed through our Bishops, can ask us anything and everything. But the whole of it is that our responses are made in the spirit of these words: *"If I wish him to remain until I come..."* We must keep in our hearts the ardent desire to go as far as possible, to go the heights and to the depths, in search of the truth.

The first sign of Jesus' apostolic life is the miracle at Cana, the last one is the apparition of Jesus to Peter. The last one is linked to a circumstance where all apostolic works are overcome. We have to perform these works when God is asking us to, but we must keep in mind that all of them must lead us to something greater. This something greater is the will of love that the heart of Jesus contains for each one of us and which must become our life. We must live on the gratuity of his love and so enter into contemplation, that is, intimacy with Jesus. The Apostles tried to catch fish all night long...but they caught nothing. Upon Jesus' order— *"Cast the net"* (Jn 21:6), there was an immediate abundance of fish. Our Apostolic life should always be a response given in obedience. It will thus be fruitful. Our only initiative is to keep silent and stay close to Jesus' heart. We dwell there in contemplation and *in a love which suffices for all things and which gathers all things into itself*. St John's Gospel helps us enter into the secret of our vocation, into what Jesus is asking from us, that is, the profound desire of this truth which takes over our life, and the concern of remaining faithful to this truth.

2000

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I have a horror of being described as the founder of the Community, I am not. I have the impression that I am more of a Saint John the Baptist with regard to St John. I am the one who is supposed to cry out that it is *him* who is our father and that perhaps the most appropriate characteristic of the grace given to us is the one of effacing ourselves so that St John might live in the Church through us. I deeply believe this to be something quite ultimate in the Church.

1991