



Father CAFFAREL, prophet of marriage
(Extracts from texts)

Content

	Page
Presentation of the Booklet	3
Introduction	
Henri Caffarel	4
Chapter 1	
Christ centre of our lives	7
Chapter 2	
Contemplation: the privileged time of encounter with Christ ...	11
Chapter 3	
Marriage, sacrament of Covenant.....	16
Chapter 4	
Married spirituality	20
Chapter 5	
Gathered in the name of Christ on the way to holiness.....	23
Chapter 6	
There is no Christian life that is not demanding	27
Chapter 7	
Apostles, open to the realities of the world	31
Chapter 8	
Under Mary's protection	35
Conclusion	
Father Caffarel, a prophet for our times	39
Bibliography	41

Presentation of the booklet on Father Caffarel :

() The Charter is not included in this booklet*

Why did we wish to transmit this collection of texts chosen from the writings of Father Caffarel to Teams members throughout the world?

- Because our era needs people able to seek the Love of God without forgetting the value of Loving human beings.

Appropriately, Father Caffarel believed in human love and especially in the love between a man and a woman. He saw in it a reflection of the Love of God

- Because our era needs to believe that one can grow in holiness in the unique daily life of each individual.

Father Caffarel is a prophet for today, not because he experienced exceptional events, but because he was able to express the demands of the faith in simple words and gestures that truly touched the hearts of people in their daily life.

- Because our era not only needs teachers but also witnesses of the faith

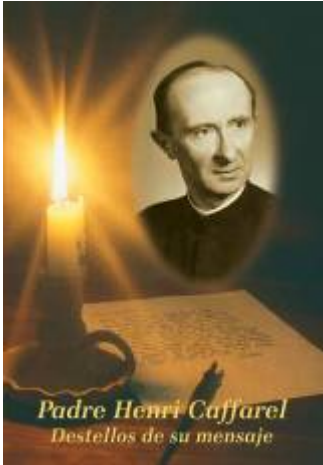
Father Caffarel did not see himself as a theologian but as a man who taught how to pray by himself praying deeply and who taught how to love by himself loving deeply.

In selecting a few of Father Caffarel's numerous writings, we do not want to present him only as the founder of the Movement of Equipes Notre-Dame, but we also want you to know Henri Caffarel the man who lived with his eyes always turned towards God without looking away from human beings around him. He lived out completely his priestly vocation whilst walking alongside those who are called to live out their married vocation. He did so believing in the strength of sacramental love between a man and a woman. He consecrated his life to this and is still present among us thanks to the thousands of couples and priests who belong to the Movement of Equipes Notre-Dame today.

The texts quoted in this booklet are the writings of a Servant of God. May you meditate and pray on them as a couple and as a team. May they give you the desire to go further in knowing the works of Father Caffarel.

Carlo and Maria-Carla Volpini.

Henri Caffarel – The Genesis



Father Caffarel was born on the 30th of July 1903 in Lyon. He was baptised on the 2nd of August 1903 and ordained priest on the 19th of April 1930 in Paris. He died on the 18th of September 1996 at Troussures, in the diocese of Beauvais where he is buried.

“Come, follow me!” These words of the Lord are written on his tomb. It was in March 1923 that took place the event that would orientate his whole life: ***“When I was 20, Jesus Christ suddenly became Someone for me. Oh! Nothing spectacular. On this distant day in March, I knew that I was loved and that I loved, and that henceforth, between Him and me, it would be for life. The die was cast”***.

The young Henri Caffarel met ***“Someone”***. And so, everything that he would establish and organise would be done little by little as the Lord would show him. Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger spoke of Father Caffarel as “a prophet of the 20th century”. He was “breaking new ground for the Church”.

Henri Caffarel was moved by the love of the Lord. His ministry was to be at the service of love: ***“to be loved, to love”***. The love of the Lord was the source of his dynamism and of his life. He was therefore immediately in tune with couples who wanted their love to blossom by the light of the Lord.

Whatever task he undertook, Father Caffarel would have only one end in mind: place people before the Lord, the beginning of all vocation.

Henri Caffarel concluded his above reminiscences with the words: ***“The die is cast”*** – a conclusion typical of him. There is nothing more to be said: you obey, you get on with the work, you don’t have a swollen head about services rendered and, when it is all over, you depart...

Rigorous, demanding, precise in details, determined to see things through, a realistic outlook on events and peoples, an ability to put aside all that did not fit in with his “vision”... That was Father Henri Caffarel.

The three phases of his life's work

I. *Laying the foundations (1939-1949)*

Father Caffarel responded to the call of couples who wanted to live out their sacrament of marriage: *“The demands of holiness concerns you. To respond to them, you have your own sacrament: that of marriage.”*

The number of teams of couples increased. He provided spiritual guidance that became increasingly clear as the discovery of the grace of marriage progressed.

Two publications: **“Letter to young couples (1942)”** (original name of what became the **“Letter of Equipes Notre-Dame”**) and **“L’Anneau d’Or (1945)”** (the “Golden Ring”), made a deep impression on numerous couples and their impact went far beyond Teams. Father Caffarel wanted to be understood by everyone so that the grace of the love of God might be active in them. He wanted everyone to understand the greatness of marriage. The stakes are still actual.

A unique landmark in Father Caffarel's activity was the drafting and implementation in 1947 of **“The Charter of Equipes Notre-Dame”**. The means laid down in the Charter are demanding: The “Obligations” (later called “Endeavours”), especially the “Sit-down”, are tailored to the life of couples. *“Once you have grasped the spirit of Teams, you will have no difficulty accepting their discipline”*, said Father Caffarel. To live out the Gospel in the life of a couple, such is *“the way to holiness”*.

At about the same time, the foundations were laid for two new movements: that of widows, later entitled: **“Hope and Life”** and the **“Fraternity of Our Lady of the Resurrection”**, a Secular Institute for widows. As always, they were not “his idea”. People came to him expressing their desire for holiness; he discerned, he encouraged, he guided.

II. *The maturing phase (1950-1973)*

The Equipes Notre-Dame developed. The organisation grew to meet the needs. Great international gatherings took place: Lourdes in 1954, Rome in 1959, Lourdes in 1965, Rome in 1970... They provided the occasion for acquiring a deeper understanding of the graces of marriage and of its greatness. Father Caffarel also stressed the mutual enrichment of the sacraments of Order and of Marriage: two “complementary” sacraments that respond to the vocation of love.

Great debates took place in Teams:

- Are they a movement of initiation or of perfection? The history of the movement showed that a balance established itself between these two aspects. Some couples who wished to progress in the mystery of Christian marriage chose, guided by Father Caffarel, some more demanding practices. They joined the “Fraternity of Joseph and Mary”.
- Difficulties arose in which what was at stake was the unity of the Movement and the freedom of the laity, its peculiarity and characteristics. In such matters, Father Caffarel was always in harmony with the Church, sometimes in exemplary and courageous ways. He referred team members to their parishes and dioceses and to their apostolate within their job and in the world.

At 70, he retired of his own volition from his role in Teams, having put a successor in place.

III. The phase of greater depth (1973-1996)

Father Caffarel's fruitfulness is engraved in hearts and in the unique relationship of each individual with God. Countless are those who found the Lord at the "House of Prayer" in Troussures. His overriding desire was to share with others the revelation he had at the age of twenty. His last years in Troussures revealed the spring from which everything in him had emanated.

His fruits that are still full of vitality

The Équipes Notre-Dame: started in 1939. They currently number more than 100,000 couples spread over 70 countries (in 2008)

The Fraternities of Our Lady of the Resurrection: founded in 1943, numbering 200 members

Hope and Life: a spiritual movement for widows

The Intercessors: who pray, fast and offer their daily life

The Fraternities of Joseph and Marie: A Movement of spiritual deepening for couples.

Father Caffarel also founded (in France) the **Centres for Marriage Preparation** with the help of Father Pierre Joly and Father Alphonse d'Heilly SJ

The "**House of Prayer**" at **Troussures** has had an immense impact on thousands of peoples who wanted to learn to pray. This work carries on also at "Massabielle" the "House of the Couple" run by Equipes Notre-Dame at Saint-Prix, Val l'Oise in the northern outskirts of Paris. It is also carried on thanks to the importance attached to interior prayer in Teams and its Schools of Prayer.

One should also note the ongoing relevance of Father Caffarel's writings in the revues "L'Anneau d'Or" (the Golden Ring), "Offertory", "Booklets on Quiet Prayer" and of his numerous books: "**In the presence of God**", "**A hundred letters on prayer**", "**At the cross-road of love**", etc...



Christ centre of our lives

“It is no longer I that lives, but Christ living in me”

Meditation

Through the Law, I am dead to the Law so that I can be alive to God. I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me. The life that I am now living, subject to the limitation of human nature, I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2: 19-20)

Introduction

At the origin of Father's Caffarel's vocation was an encounter: His Encounter with Christ; it was a fundamental encounter that turned his whole life upside down, an encounter that, thereafter, involved everything. Christ became at the heart of Father Caffarel's life: his life totally welcoming to Christ's life in him, the basis of the Christian life. This is what was at the origin of his priestly vocation and of his apostolic message. It became for him something absolute and non-negotiable. It became an ongoing searching for Christ (an expression he used frequently in his writings) through listening to his Word.

To yearn for God, to look for him in all things, is the pre-requisite of a total Love that is uniquely characteristic of Him who is all love for humanity. Living as he did in this Love of Christ, Father Caffarel had no hesitation in strongly and energetically exhorting us in our flabbiness and lack of enthusiasm to follow what, in his eyes, was the Christian ideal. He unceasingly reminded us to dialogue with God in prayer and contemplation, to nourish ourselves daily with the Word: the Gospel and sacred texts. It is at this price that it is possible to live out the evangelical ideal totally and unreservedly.

Chosen Texts

IF CHRIST IS ALIVE IN US, HE IS PRAYING, since, for Christ, to live is to pray. Join him; take hold of his prayer, make it yours - or rather, since the words I have just used lay too much emphasis on your action, allow his prayer to grip you, to invade you, to lift you up and take you to the Father. I do not promise you that you will be aware of it, I only ask you to believe that it is in you and, in the course of your quiet prayer, to give him and indeed to renew your full involvement. Make way for him, totally. May his prayer take hold of every fibres of your being like the fire penetrating the wood and making it incandescent.

To pray is to agree to what Christ asks of us: “Lend me your understanding, your heart, everything that in a human being has the potential to become prayer so that I may be able to call forth from you a great hymn of praise of the Father. Have I come for anything else than to set the earth on fire, a fire that spreads from near and far transforming all the trees of the forest into a live torch? This fire is my prayer. Agree to it”.

Christ is present in a newly baptised baby as in a great mystic; but the life of Christ in the one is not at the same stage of development as in the other. Though the prayer of Christ is already vibrating in the soul of the newly baptised, it is as yet only a spark, a spark of fire. It is only in the course of existence and dependent on our cooperation that it becomes more intense and gradually takes possession of our whole being.

Our cooperation consists first of all in associating ourselves, with our deepest will, to the prayer of Christ in us. But please make a special note of the very strong meaning I attach to the expression ‘associate ourselves to’. It does not mean some kind of lukewarm attachment, an agreement lightly given, but a total gift in the way that a log that is placed in the fire submits itself to the flame to become fire in its turn. Furthermore, our cooperation consists in seeking, with all our understanding, of what consists the prayer of Christ in us, its main elements: praise, thanksgiving, offering, intercession... so as to assume them more perfectly.

You asked me for subjects for meditation – I know of no better one.

Henri Caffarel - L'Anneau d'or; May- August 1967

THE ESSENTIAL IS TO SEEK CHRIST. Alas! The expression “to seek Christ” is so well-worn, I fear it might awake only a weak echo in you.

But, here are a few texts – or rather – a few heartfelt cries from Saint Paul that will show you what it means to seek Christ and - having found him - to belong to him.

Saint Paul is consumed by charity: “*The love of Christ urges us on*” (2 Cor. 5: 14). “*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors...*” (Rm 8: 35-37).

As happens to all of us, Saint Paul is sometimes faced with the alternatives: to please people or to please God. He has made up his mind: “*Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ*” (Gal 1: 10). “*We are fools for the sake of Christ*” (1 Cor. 4: 10).

Christ is the magnetic pole of his life. But he does not hesitate to sacrifice the delights of his intimacy with Christ in order to serve his brethren, so that, in their turn, they may belong to his master: “*I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you*” (Ph. 1: 23-24).

He is not spared a variety of sufferings and no doubt he has experienced times of anguish. “*...for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust*” (2 Tm 1: 12). Do you perceive all the heroic courage and tenderness of heart that lie beneath these words? His life has only one aim: he will be faithful to the point of martyrdom: “*For he must reign...*” (1 Cor 15: 25).

No doubt we are far from such holiness. But the question is whether or not we want to be consumed by the same devouring passion

Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame; November 1948

BUT IN FACT, WHAT IS FAITH? Here is one of the best definitions of it: “a participation in the knowledge that God has of himself” and, we must add, ‘in his knowledge of everything’. It is precisely of this last aspect that I want to speak to you for a moment before inviting you to question yourselves on your faith.

Do you have God’s outlook on everything? What he values, what he does not like; do you share these? I will not, in fact, dwell further on this first consideration, although there is much to be said about it. My aim, today, is to lead you to ask yourself this question: “Does my inner sight lead me to see God present, active and sanctifying everywhere? Does it see the divine dimension of people around me and of events?” Let me explain by means of examples:

- When you are in a coach or in a train, do you look with the eyes of Christ at all these people you see around you with their worries and burdens?
- Does Christ’s great loving concern swell up in your heart for them?
- This sick person, this poor man, this abandoned woman who ask for your help, do you discern in their call the unmistakable sound of the voice of Christ?
- You, parents, looking down at your little child, do you discern the Holy Trinity present in its soul? It is said that Origen’s father would quietly approach his sleeping child and kiss his chest, the tabernacle of his God.
- When happenings in your lives upset your plans, do you discern the hand of God? In this connection, call to mind the words of Pascal: “If God himself were to give us masters, how willingly would we not obey them! Necessity and happenings in our lives are such undoubted masters”.
- And when newspapers report cruel, disconcerting and worrying world events, does your faith tell you that Christ conquers all, that he controls history with a master’s authority and that his irreproachable and unailing love cannot be frustrated by human beings?

Do you want to acquire the outlook and reactions of faith that he commands?

Allow me to suggest a way: Decide that, today from morning till night, you will make a very special effort to see all beings and happenings with the eyes of faith. You will begin the day with that prayer inspired by Ezekiel (11: 19) “*Lord, put a new spirit in my heart*”. I assure you that your day will be like no other.

Henri Caffarel - Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame ; December 1956

Testimony

Our first true encounter with Father Caffarel's message was in 2000 when friends of ours brought us a present: Jean Allemand's book "Henri Caffarel, a man gripped by God". Through reading these pages, we became closer to this wonderful man who gave his life in the service of God and of men and women. We became aware of the importance of having a true life of Prayer.

Prayer has become for us a time of personal encounter with God, a time during which we gave Him the opportunity to speak to us. Father Caffarel asks us to do ten to fifteen minutes of daily silent prayer, as one of the Teams' Endeavours. He would himself set aside two months a year to be with the Lord. This gave him the necessary strength to carry out his pastoral work. He did not only use words but lived out himself what he wanted to say before passing it on.

Through reading Father Caffarel's writings, we became more aware of what Prayer means in the life of a Christian. Nevertheless, we observe that there is still a lot of "noise" in the life of lay people in general. We spend most of our time seeking happiness and wanting the happiness of those we love; but we try to do it our way. We do not realise that our true happiness lies in discovering that God loves every individual in a personal way and has a plan for each one of us in this world. If we were able to discover his plan for each one of us, we would then be full happy and would bring happiness to others. Prayer is the appropriate and best way to make this discovery.

Such is the central message that we have discovered thanks to Father Caffarel. If we are motivated to act in a world of "doing", we need to stop on the way to regain our strength in order to act more and better. It is imperative that we "rest" in the loving arms of the Father to find joy and peace. This is what Father Caffarel calls "silent prayer". We enter into it through recollection with the awareness of the sweet presence of our Lord. It is a true awareness, in the depth of our soul, of LOVE that is God in us. He is present there and urges us to continue to live and pass on his message of love, in spite of the contradictions of this world. If we are truly with God, our life changes forever and it becomes impossible for us not to communicate him to others.

We, human beings, must learn to be silent so as to allow "God to speak to each one of us". We would then live in a totally different world.

Maria and Augustin Fragueiro (END Argentina).

You who are at home in the depth of my heart

Let me join you in the depth of my heart



Contemplation: the privileged time of encounter with Christ

“It is all a question of knowing whether eating is vital. It is all a question of knowing whether praying is vital.”

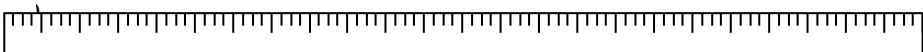
Meditation

And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But, when you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. In your prayers do not babble as the gentiles do, for they think that by using many words, they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Mt 6: 5-8)

Introduction

For Father Caffarel, prayer is a very special time of encounter with God, particularly in the form of contemplative prayer. Not only was his daily life filled with this presence of God, but he never ceased to teach others to pray and to pass on to them what he experienced himself. His teaching method is based on the fundamental requirement of putting prayer at the heart of every person's life. He transmitted it through many of his writings: the Teams' newsletter, the Anneau d'Or and, his series of booklets on prayer. It was especially in the second part of his life that his teaching developed, addressed especially to lay people active in the world. At the House of Prayer at Troussures, which he made into an international centre for prayer, he led weeks of prayer, correspondence courses on prayer and evenings of formation. He founded the movement of Intercissors. He did not omit to study the new charismatic currents arising in the Church. Various books, based on his experience as a spiritual prayer counsellor, bear witness to that period. Father Caffarel practised his prayer life in a demanding way; he wished and earnestly urged others to do the same.

Chosen texts



Sleep

Work

Meals

Relaxing

Prayer

Look at this time-scale. It has 96 divisions: the 96 quarters of an hour that make up a day. Count from the left the number of hours that you reserve for sleeping and draw a vertical line. Then count the number of hours you spend working at home or at work and draw another vertical line. Then count the hours for meal-time, then the hours travelling, reading the paper, etc... Finally, starting from the right, count the time you spend praying... And compare!

You tell me that: "Nothing is more misleading than this kind of calculations. You relate to each other's realities that cannot be related. Prayer is not a matter of time, anymore than is love. It is not because I spend ten hours a day working and very little time talking to my wife and children that I don't love them, that I love them less than my work. Love is not a matter of time".

How often the love between husband and wife and between parents and children is in jeopardy precisely because one neglects to keep it alive and deepen it. Human love requires contacts, exchanges and heart-to-heart moments. It is vital.

The same applies to love of God. It declines in the soul of Christians who do not set time aside for meeting with their Lord, moments of exchanges, of intimacy, that is to say of prayer. It is no less vital.

Some might retort: "But how do you expect me to find time for prayer?" This leaves me wondering... Either they have not understood the vital role of prayer in supporting their religious life, or they suffer from a kind of alienation as in the case of a mother with a large family, suffering from serious anaemia, who says to her doctor: "How do you expect me to find time for eating with my eight children and all that this entails of bottle-feeding, nappy-washing, giving the little ones their bath, helping the older ones with their homework...?"

It is all a question of knowing whether eating is vital. It is all a question of knowing whether praying is vital.

After all, it is perhaps all the fault of us priests if Christians do not believe in the value of prayer. Do we warn them sufficiently that spiritual anaemia threatens them? When they come to confess sins of cowardice, pride, impurity... instead of urging them to try not to do it again, do we draw their attention to the cause: their state of minimal resistance that makes them terribly vulnerable? Do we recommend to them that which alone will allow them to acquire spiritual vitality and therefore to resist the threats from within and without: namely prayer?

Would not people say to me, rather, that the great remedy is the Eucharist? No doubt, but the Eucharist in a soul that does not pray, is like casting seeds in a field that has not been ploughed: it cannot bear fruits. After twenty years of priestly ministry, I think I can say with confidence that Christians who do not devote every day ten minutes to a quarter of an hour (the 1/96th part of their day) to this type of prayer that we call contemplative prayer or meditation, will always remain in spiritual infancy or, rather, will decline. They will experience some grave crises from which they will not emerge with glory, from which perhaps they will not emerge for a long time.

Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame ; November 1952

AFTER THIRTY-SIX YEARS OF PRIESTLY LIFE, it seems increasingly obvious to me that, if so many Christians are spiritually and psychologically sick, worried,

depressed or overexcited, if so many couples do not achieve agreement, harmony, union and the joy they had hoped for, if Christianity is so deeply divided - as much in its thinking as in its action - it is because the importance of prayer is not really known. When individuals or societies no longer link up with God by prayer, they are handed over defenceless to the forces of disintegration.

My experience leaves me in no doubt: prayer is as vital for you lay people as it is for us priests. Get me right; I am not referring to a quick morning or evening vocal prayer, but to what we call quiet prayer or meditation.

Great is my joy to see some of them achieve, thanks to daily quiet prayer, this constant prayer that Saint Paul recommended, as did Christ: *“Pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God”* (1 Thes 5: 17-18).

Henri Caffarel - Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame ; October 1966

THIS GOD WITHIN YOU IS NOT A SILENT GOD: HE SPEAKS, but to hear him you must be still. *“The Father speaks a Word and it is his Son. He spoke it in an eternal silence, a silence that the soul hears”* (Saint John of the Cross).

To be still is difficult in our terribly noisy world. I am not only talking about physical noises but of all those events, sensational news and various threats that the media, conjurer of our modern times, proclaims from the roof tops or whispers in our ears. It all comes to stir our senses, our imagination, our thoughts and our heart. It leads a hectic song-and-dance that disturbs our prayer. Nevertheless, interior silence is possible. To achieve it, one needs to train oneself with patience and gentleness. Violent means have never been good ways of calming oneself; and it is indeed calming that is needed: calming of all our faculties so that they become accessible to God, motionless, listening. Listening calls for a certain quality of silence, namely recollection. It is an attentiveness that is fully awake, ready to detect the inner voice. Claudel wrote: *“Many wise men had already told us that, to hear, it might perhaps be enough just to listen. How true this is! But it is not with our hearing aid, it is not even with sharp understanding that we put ourselves on the alert, it is with the whole of our being that we listen to the Being that exists there”*.

And no doubt you will say to me again that you despair of achieving interior silence, a sacred recollection. It is true that our efforts alone do not suffice; divine grace must play a part. But how could God refuse this grace? He is much too desirous that this silence should enter into your soul so that the dialogue of the Father with his child may become possible. Trust him; persevere in contemplative prayer and Christ will quieten and return to himself your wandering faculties, like the shepherd Saint Teresa of Avila talks about who, at nightfall, plays the pipe to gather his sheep scattered about the fields.

Henri Caffarel - L'Anneau d'or; May-August 1957

DO NOT LOOK IN THESE PAGES FOR TIPS FOR GARANTEED SUCCESS; TRY RATHER TO GRASP THE UNDERLYING SPIRIT. It is true of contemplative prayer as of many activities that it is important to make a good start. Failing that, after five minutes, one is surprised to find oneself on a kneeler and, whilst the body has come to pray, the mind has remained absorbed in other things.

I strongly advise you, therefore, to pay attention to initial gestures and attitudes: a clear attitude of someone awake, self-aware and present to God and making a deep bow or a slow and meaningful sign of the cross. Calm and slow movements are of great importance in breaking the rapid and tense rhythm of a busy and hurried life. A few moments of silence will, like applying the brake, play their part in introducing you to the rhythm of contemplative prayer and bring about the necessary break from previous activities. It may also be a good idea to say a vocal prayer slowly and in a low voice.

Become aware then – I do not say of the presence of God – but of God present, alive: “The Great Alive” who is there, waiting for you, who sees you, loves you. He has his idea about this prayer that is beginning and is asking you to be blindly in agreement with what he expects from it.

Pay even more attention to interior attitudes than to those of the body, that is to say, a human being’s fundamental attitudes before God: dependence and repentance:

- *Dependence*: not the vague submission of one who must sometimes give up a pet project so as to do the will of God, but a much more fundamental dependence, like that of the torrent that is stopped if it is cut off from its source, or that of a vine-shoot that dries up and rots when it is severed from the vine, or that of the human body that is not even a body any longer but a corpse when the link that bounds it to the soul is broken.
- *Repentance*: this acute sense of our fundamental unworthiness in the presence of the Holiness of God, like Saint Peter who suddenly prostrated himself before Christ and said: “*Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man*” (Lk 5: 8).

These two attitudes are important so as to make smooth in you the ways of the Lord.

The soul having been thus prepared, ask for the grace of contemplative prayer since, as I have already told you, contemplative prayer is a gift from God before being a human activity. Humbly call on the Holy Spirit, our Master of prayer. You can then adopt the bodily attitude that is most favourable to setting the soul free.

Having prepared yourself in this way, you can now begin contemplative prayer, properly so called. What do you expect from it? That God may take possession of you. The only way for this to happen is to make use of the three great natural faculties the Lord has given you, precisely so that you can enter into contact and communion with him. They are appropriately called *theological* virtues and are faith, hope and charity. They are the supernatural dynamic forces in you that are ready to come into play as soon as you come to God.

- Exercise your faith. I do not ask you to speculate about God, but to think of him by meditating on what he says about himself through Creation (in which everything speaks of his perfections), in the Bible and especially and first of all, in his Son who became man, lived and died so as to reveal to us the infinite love of the Father....
- But what is important is not to think a lot but to love much. Faith having set charity in motion, do exercise it. For the second time, I have used the word “exercise”. Do not misunderstand me, I am not recommending an unbridled exercise of the will. The exercise of faith and charity should be as natural and easy as breathing. Exercising charity will not consist so much in giving rise in

yourself to emotions, fervour and feelings, than in adhering with all your will to God himself and in espousing his desires and his interest.

- It is also the characteristic of love to aspire to union with the object of one's love and to the happiness it promises. When it refers to God, this aspiring is called "hope". So do exercise hope also.

Let me add one more remark before leaving you. One does not become a contemplative person from one day to the next, any more than a cabinet-maker, a musician or a writer, without a determined apprenticeship.

Extract from "Présence à Dieu" by Father Caffarel in Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame; Sept.–Oct 1970

Testimony

I will retain only one memory of Father Caffarel, the man of prayer: his long daily hours of silent prayer and adoration. Whatever happened in his very busy life, he made time for God. But it is not enough to say this: his daily encounter with God was vital, natural and essential. It logically followed from his loving encounter with Christ in March 1923 that determined his whole life and especially his prayer life. When one loves and knows oneself to be loved, one quite simply yearns to be alone with the Beloved.

I like to picture him again in the chapel at Troussures, sitting on his little prayer stool, his body and head straight, his eyes usually closed, his hands wide open on his knees, perfectly motionless, fully recollected, fully present to God at the very depth of his being. Nothing else mattered. He appeared to be both totally receptive and totally offering, standing in front of his Lord and God like a sheet stretched out in the sun, a comparison he favoured when talking about prayer. There was no affectation or softish sentimentality, but peace, stability and strength emanating from him.

To offer and submit oneself to the transforming Love of God in total surrender and unshakeable trust, such was, I believe, one of the secrets of his prayer: a secret that could be summed up in the words that Christ spoke to Saint Catherine of Sienna: "Make your self capacity and I will make myself into a torrent". Father Caffarel liked to comment as follows on those words: "Make yourself capacity in faith and the torrent of my love will pour itself out into your heart".

Was that not the source of all the fruitfulness of his ministry?

Elisabeth Saleon Terras (France)

***You who are at home in the depth of my heart
Make me live by you in the depth of my heart***

Chapter 3



Marriage, Sacrament of Covenant

“A real Christian couple is a great work of God; the brightness of the sacrament of marriage is the reflection of the immense tenderness that unites Christ to the Church”

Meditation

Husbands should love their wives, just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy by washing her in cleansing water with a form of words, so that when he took the Church to himself she would be glorious, with no speck or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and faultless. In the same way, husbands must love their wives as they love their own bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him to love himself. A man never hates his body, but he feeds it and looks after it; and that is the way Christ treats the Church, because we are parts of his Body. This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh. This mystery has great significance, but I am applying it to Christ and the Church. To sum up; you also, each one of you, must love his wife as he loves himself; and let every wife respect her husband. (Ephesians 5: 25-33)

Introduction

Following his involvement with couples, Father Caffarel made a point of reflecting in depth on the mystery of the sacrament of marriage and in contributing his theological reflection to the Church. His reflection was always based on the Word of God as well as on observing, listening as well as on the participation of couples and the contribution of reputed theologians. Following on a meticulous work of research he elaborated a renewed vision of Christian marriage and of sexuality. He has participated in very specific ways in the renewal of the thinking of the Church on marriage. He took a leading role in the pontifical preparatory commissions for the 2nd Vatican council and by his work of research and information. This is born out by his report on “Christian marriage in the Church of the 60s” and the special issue of the Anneau d’Or on “Marriage and the Council: a renewal of marriage for a renewal of the Church”. The appropriateness of his thinking was later affirmed by John XXIII and then especially by Paul VI at gatherings of Teams in Rome in 1959 and 1970.

Chosen Texts

THE WORLD OF LOVE IS CLOSE TO THE KINGDOM OF GRACE. Young engaged couples have a wonderful experience of it. Married couples confirm this throughout their lives provided they let themselves be guided by God. It is He who, gradually, makes them discover the gaps in the frontier.

Far from imprisoning hearts, true love liberates and expands them extraordinarily. I would go further: engaged and married couples experience a kind of state of grace or, at any rate, an opening to grace. This is because from love to Christian life there is continuity in a way, since “God is love”.

Love invites love. To be loved leads loving. There arises a feeling of wonder, of gratitude, of generosity which is impatient to express itself - and we did not know that its source was within us.

Henri Caffarel - L'Anneau d'or ; May- August 1964

WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN MEANING OF SEXUALITY? How do you live out your sexuality in a Christian way?

This inquiry revealed at the same time that, amongst the couples, the Christian meaning of sexuality is almost completely unknown. Not even as many as 2% gave a genuinely worth-while reply to the following question: What is the Christian meaning of sexuality? How do you live your sexuality in a Christian way? Another thing which came out of all this, something which has now greatly changed, most of the couples who replied had a special concern in regard to respecting what they called the law of the Church. They achieved this with difficulty, often with a great deal of impatience and perhaps wishing to rebel, but they did not concern themselves with the human quality of intercourse, and I came to understand through reading, studying and meditating on these replies, that there cannot be a genuine moral law of sexuality if there has not been any concern with the quality of sexuality. Please excuse the expression, formerly I used to hate it, it is rather common, but I think it is important, as regards the manner of making love well, of having good sexual relations. Well, Christian couples, like the rest, have the sexuality of barbarians; I have not the time to tell you now how my thinking has evolved thanks to the confidences I have received and the research I have done personally and with certain couples. So, I speak of this as something which has not been done, and something which must be done, it is absolutely essential to guide couples towards a human and Christian perfection of sexual relations.

Well, with the Teams of Our Lady, it is now affirmed in the Church that sexuality is a factor of sanctification, provided it is grasped and evangelised, that pleasure is a reality which is holy in God's order of things, and should not be suspect as it is in those doleful types of spirituality which we often come across. And this goes much further, in the whole life of the world the natural values are not to be looked down on; we must adopt them, and sexuality is one type of these values. It is so important currently to understand all this in order to save sexuality from being treated as unimportant, for currently sexuality is at risk of this, and to save sexuality from eroticism.

Conference given by Father Henri Caffarel to a meeting of European Regional Couples at Chantilly, Sunday 3 May 1987

THE MARRIED COMMUNITY IS SOLID, because grace is a powerful force of union. It creates this union, mends it and consolidates it day after day...

The source of this grace is the sacrament of marriage. Like all other sacraments, it is the fruit of the Cross. As I have said (on a previous occasion), God is already present at the heart of ordinary natural love and those who look for him there, find him. However, in Christian couples, united by the sacrament of marriage, his presence is infinitely more real and efficacious.

It is not love, strictly speaking, that becomes sacrament but the covenant (between Christ and the couple) and the union that comes from it. The love that inspires this covenant, however, and is the living soul of this union, participates in the sacrament. We can say that it is not only sanctified by the sacrament but is sanctifying.

Henri Caffarel - L'Anneau d'or; July, 1945

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE IS NOT ONLY THE RECIPROCAL SELF GIVING OF A MAN AND OF A WOMAN; it is also the couple giving themselves to Christ. Henceforth, Christ is present in this couple that have opened themselves to him by giving themselves. Already, where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, he is present; but, in the case of a couple, there is something more and better: there is a pact, a covenant in the biblical sense of the word, between Christ and the couple. What Yahweh said in former times: "I will be your God and you will be my people", Christ now says to the couple. Bound thus to the couple and present in them, Christ yearns to give thanks to his Father and to intercede for the whole world with and through the couple...

For as long as we do not acquire this understanding, we cannot fully grasp the sense of conjugal prayer. Its necessity and greatness can only be understood in the context of the sacrament of marriage. In a word, when Christ unites a man and a woman sacramentally, he sets up a sanctuary. This sanctuary of the Christian couple is where he will be able to celebrate, with the couple and through the couple, the great filial cult of praise, adoration and intercession that he came to establish on earth.

Henri Caffarel – short article in the monthly letter of Equipes Notre-Dame – April 1968

THE CHRISTIAN COUPLE IS NOT CONTENT TO OFFER HUMAN RICHES, and to reveal fundamental truths, they give their guests the richness of grace by which they live. It is this grace that we must now briefly assess.

Its great spiritual richness is the presence of Christ who transforms this family community into a "little church". "When two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them"; to this Tertullian added: "When two are together, there the Church is". No doubt, this presence of Christ and of the Church remains invisible. The Muslim or Jew who come to this home are not aware of it, but their lack of knowledge does not prevent Christ acting. Christians themselves, often including priests also, experience great spiritual benefits from visiting such a home. Listen to this testimony: "A religious, having spent some time with a large family for a period of rest, said to his hostess as he left: 'You can have no idea of the comfort and peace that contact with a family like yours can provide'. I believe that, if a priest is going through a crisis, as sometimes happens in their 40s, there is no better way of rediscovering his balance than to share for a time in the life of a Christian family."

After this rapid assessment of your human and spiritual riches, you will understand why it is said of a couple that they are "an exceptionally effective instrument of apostolate". There, divine grace and riches make use of the most modest as well as the most attractive human realities in order to communicate themselves. I am referring to all these riches of love that we spoke about a moment ago. How poor, in a way, is the isolated apostle by comparison with the couple-apostle! Of course the priest who visits a sick person and gives absolution, has exceptional powers for transmitting grace; the ministry of a priest, however, is different from a visit of a Christian family. One of you has expressed it in admirable terms: "The Christian home is the gentle smiling face of the Church".

"The gentle smiling face of the Church"- Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame ; January 1962

Testimony

There is a deep division in our culture on the subject of marriage and sexuality. By his teaching and writings, Father Caffarel has confronted this ever-present question.

These words of this elderly priest are significant: "Formerly, it was simpler; the rules were clear. Before marriage: no sexual relationships. In marriage: no playing around, no deviation! The teaching of the Church was not questioned. Divorce was out of the question. It was clear. It was only a matter of forming the

conscience of the faithful and of being merciful when failings occurred. Young people today do not seem to me to be any worse than in former times. Conscience has not disappeared, but we have changed the way we apply it. My words as a priest were acknowledged and respected when I spoke of God's law in sexual matters. This is no longer the case today. I feel in a different world".

Father Caffarel's question was "how is one to humanise sexuality?". His answer was not to make definitive statements but invite people to question themselves.

He offered a fascinating journey "from sexuality to love". The way sexual life is regulated is very important for the humanisation of human beings. A well lived out sexuality can contribute to the building up of men and women. If it is not well lived out, it can damage the life and humanity of men and women. Under God's reign, sexuality and faithfulness cannot be dissociated. It is a decisive step in establishing a relationship with God.

Love is the law of sexuality and characterises the union between man and woman. Love is being different; love is sacrifice; love is built up over time through successes and failures. It is in the couple that the three aspects of sexuality are expressed: relationship, pleasure and fecundity. The couple can only grow through a balanced integration of these three dimensions of sexuality.

Love is something in the making. The perfect couple does not exist. The full blossoming of sexuality is never achieved. For Christians, it is a gift received from the Holy Spirit, acting from within. God does not identify holiness with perfection.

The true meaning of sexuality and the basis on which to measure its value is the human being, created and liberated by God, in relationship to his/her neighbour. Human beings, liberated by Christ, are called to live out their sexuality in freedom, but in a responsible freedom. Sexuality is liberated in Jesus Christ in its own right and is lived out in relationship to one's neighbour and to God. It is destined to become a language of love, of communion and of life.

Father Angelo EPIS (Spiritual Counsellor of the International Leading Team)

***You who are at home in the depth of my heart
Glorify your holy name in the depth of my heart***



Married spirituality

“Your marriage: a union of two seekers of God”

Meditation

“Whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot accept since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you” (Jn. 14: 13 - 17)

Introduction

At the same time that he was bringing up to date the theological reflection on marriage and was giving couples a way of deepening their understanding of their sacrament of marriage through membership of Equipes Notre-Dame, Father Caffarel was keen to offer to couples a specific spirituality which he called married spirituality. It is developed, not on the basis of the monastic life, but on the married state of life, with all its demands, its difficulties and its graces. To practise this married spirituality allows husbands and wives to live out their married love and the Love of Christ as one and only love that leads them on the way to holiness. For Father Caffarel, married spirituality finds its source in seeking the mind of God on the whole of married and family life and its openness to social or apostolic life. This pursuit will be based, for the couple, on the practice of encountering Christ through prayer as a couple.

Chosen Texts

THE WORD « SPIRITUALITY » CAUSES PROBLEMS. We must not be mistaken about its meaning. It is certainly not an escape into a dream world.

To those who ask you “What are these Teams?” you no doubt answer: “They are groups of spirituality”. The reactions to this reply are varied, as you will no doubt have experienced. They don’t all show interest or appreciation.

- Sometimes, it is just a condescending smile of the kind we give to a charming eccentric, harmless but of little use to others, who reveals that he collects Roman coins, autographs or butterflies.
- Sometimes, you are told: “I am no mystic; it is enough for me to be a good Christian. I am much too busy with my work, family or social commitments to take on spirituality as well!”

- Sometimes, people are genuinely shocked: “Fancy running away from reality in this way; is it not a betrayal? When there is so much hardship around us calling for everyone’s dedication! When a new culture is developing that will be against us if it is not build with us”.

These reactions stem from a big misunderstanding. Some seem to liken spirituality to a pastime, to a distraction! Others hold it in greater esteem but see it only as the pursuit of prayer and virtues. It would not occur to them that spirituality could be related in any way to family, job or civic responsibilities. Both these reactions ignore what spirituality really is.

How can we dispel any ambiguity?

No doubt, all we have to do is to define clearly what the word spirituality means:

Spirituality is to do with the Christian life and the ways that lead to its full development.

The fullness of the Christian life does not consist only in adoration, praise, asceticism. It consists also in serving God wherever He has placed us: our home and family, our job, our civic involvements etc

It follows that couples who meet together to develop their spiritual life, far from looking for ways of escaping from the world, are endeavouring to learn to imitate Christ by serving God, fully in the world, in all aspects of their life.

Henri Caffarel - Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame ; June 1950

YOU WILL BEAR WITNESS TO GOD AS A COUPLE even more explicitly if you are a union of “seekers of God” to use the admirable expression of the psalm: two seekers whose minds and hearts are eager to know and meet God; passionate seekers of God impatient to be united with him; seekers for whom God is the great reality in their lives; seekers who are more interested in God than in anything else. In such a couple, everything is seen and conceived in relation to God. I am not speaking theoretically. Numerous are those I know among you who are true seekers of God in whom a secret cord vibrates whenever God’s name is mentioned in their presence. The home of such a couple is a place of worship in which husband and wife “*worship the Father in spirit and truth*” (Jn 4: 23).

I would like to pass on to you my conviction that a couple who are “seekers of God” in our world that no longer believes in God, are a “theophany”, a manifestation of God as was for Moses the bush in the desert “*that was blazing but was not being burned up*” (Ex 3: 2).

Extract from Father Caffarel’s Conference : “In the face of Atheism” ; Rome, 5 may 1970

The science and the art of sanctifying oneself, in and through the priesthood, is priestly spirituality. **THE SCIENCE AND ART OF SANCTIFYING ONESELF, IN AND THROUGH MARRIAGE, IS MARRIED SPIRITUALITY...**

It is a matter of christianising the whole of family life; and first and foremost to look for the Christian significance of all family realities and to ask oneself the question: “Basically, what is the mind of God on love, paternity and motherhood, sexuality and formation in all the great aspects of home life?” It is not only a matter of discovering but of wanting to realise God’s idea in all these areas.

Furthermore, one must seek to discover what could be called a Christian style of home life:

- the Christian style of inter-personal relationships, between husband and wife, between parents and children, between parents and grand parents, between the couple and their friends.
- The Christian style of the environment: the home, meals, expenditure.
- The Christian style of daily activities: work, leisure, getting up, going to bed, evenings spent together, hospitality. What should one do to make all this Christian, look Christian and be resplendent of the grace of Christ?
- A Christian style of days of the week: Sunday should not be lived as a Saturday, Saturday as a Thursday, Thursday as the other days of the week.
- A Christian style of great events: birth, sickness, trials, marriage, death... To live out these events in a Christian way.

And all this “so that, in all things, God may be glorified”, as St Benedict says.

Finally, since the couple is not isolated in society and in the Church, married and family spirituality is also a spirituality of the involvement of the couple in social and Church work.

L'anneau d'or n°84

Testimony

As friends from our earliest age, then as an engaged couple and, finally, as a young married couple, we did not feel that the spiritual side of our love and of our marriage had and could have such great importance and this despite the examples around us and a good preparation to marriage. It took us several years to become aware of this spiritual dimension and of this very special aspect our married and family union.

From the beginning of our involvement in them, Equipes Notre-Dame have opened us to this married spirituality that stems from that same openness to the Holy Spirit that affect us individually. It is the Holy Spirit that “makes a man and a woman able to love each other as Christ has loved us”.

We have discovered and experienced the witness given by love, unity and faithfulness in married relationships and of couples' unshakable love in trials and difficulties. And we have discovered how much the spiritual life of the couple sustains, consolidates and strengthen our human and spiritual union in keeping with the promise we made in our married vows to become 'one flesh'. And so, thanks to our discovery of married spirituality, promoted by Father Caffarel and the couples who worked with him, we were able to build an intimate communion of body and soul. This union has born fruit with the advent of children to whom we have tried to give a true human and Christian formation.

With the help of the grace of Christ we try to practise faithfulness, forgiveness and reconciliation, self giving and the spirit of sacrifice, social contacts and peace, respect and a spirit of love. But this is not achieved without the practice of asceticism as Father Caffarel reminded us one evening in December 1993 in his office in Troussures: “Be demanding and you will never disappoint”.

Gérard and Marie Christine de Roberty (END France)

***You who are at home in the depth of my heart
I want what you want in the depth of my heart***

Chapter 5

Gathered in the name of Christ on the path to Holiness



“Wanting their love, sanctified by the sacrament of marriage, to be a praise to God and a witness to men, they have decided to form a team. Couples come to Teams for God and remain in them for God.”

Meditation

Acts of the Apostles (Ac 2: 42-47)

They remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.

And everyone was filled with awe; the Apostles worked many signs and miracles. And all who shared the faith, owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each needed.

Each day, with one heart, they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day, the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved.

Introduction

In all the writings of Father Caffarel - and especially those relating to married couples - one finds an element of theological research, an element of entering into relationship with God and, thirdly, a consideration of practical means of living out and putting into practice daily the theological reflection and the spirituality that he had outlined. This is how Equipes Notre-Dame came into being, a movement that Father Caffarel wanted to be, not only at the service of couples, but of the Church also. Teams were his great work from 1939 to 1973. They developed year by year, based on experiences and tentative initiatives. Father Caffarel's thinking on Teams can be traced in the editorials of Teams News Letters, in talks he gave on his travels and in the fundamental conferences he gave at Gatherings. In all these, one finds Father Caffarel's mission to accompany each couple on their journey to holiness through marriage and on the development of their relationship with Christ. For him, both the team and the couple are, not only a way of experiencing the Church, but also a service rendered by the Church to the world.

Chosen Texts

WE FORM A TEAM because on the last day of his life, during his last conversation with his apostles, Jesus Christ revealed his most secret wish: “May they all be one, ...I have given them the glory you gave to me that they may be one as we are one. With me in them

and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you love me” (Jn 17: 21-23).

... and because, as disciples of Christ, we intend to respond to his wish.

WE FORM A TEAM because we believe that Jesus Christ is still in the world, that he works unseen, mysteriously and tirelessly to conquer, to take hold and bind to himself men and women so as to fulfil the task the Father has given him to do: the great Unity of all creatures in himself.

... and because we want to join the game, co-operate in his work, “*bring everything together under Christ*” (Eph 1: 10).

WE FORM A TEAM because we believe that it is not enough to aspire to total Unity, to be moved at the thought of the reconciliation of all Christians, to expect that the forthcoming Council (2nd Vatican Council) will contribute to this reconciliation, but that it will make us *build* Unity, *bring about unity* wherever it is within our reach, where it depends directly on us.

This awareness is guarantee of the quality of our wish for a wider unity.

WE FORM A TEAM, because we believe that, to dream about ecumenism and not begin by creating a true unity between husband and wife, between parents and children, is indulging in a pipedream and because, to bring about this unity of our marriage, we need the enlightenment and help of other couples.

WE FORM A TEAM, because, wherever we belong (block of flats, district, relatives, parish), we want to be workers of unity and we need to learn this unity with the help of friendly couples and to be supported by them in our efforts.

WE FORM A TEAM, because we want our brothers and sisters to know that God loves them, that he wants to save them. We want them to discover this thanks to the witness of our unity and of our fraternal love, for Christ said “*May they all be one... so that the world may believe it was you who sent me*” (Jn 17: 21).

WE FORM A TEAM, because we want that there should be in the world one more modest but authentic reflection of the greatest beauty, of the greatest holiness, of the greatest love which is the life of the Trinity, that is to say human beings who are one in Love and in the Holy Spirit as the Father and the Son are *in the unity* of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.

We want unity between husband and wife, between parents and children, between couples in a team, between teams in our supranational Movement, because we desire, with all the energy of our charity, the unity of all human beings in Christ. Such is the spirit of unity that is the soul of Equipes Notre-Dame.

Henri Caffarel - Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame, Octobre 1961

YOU HAVE UNDERTAKEN TO HELP AND SUPPORT THE MEMBERS OF YOUR TEAM; you feel responsible and want to be (in part) responsible for their human and Christian fulfilment; it is now a matter of working at it, of giving to them, of giving yourself to them.

However poor we may be, we have enormously to give since, what those around us need first of all, are not our goods but ourselves. That is also the most difficult thing to

do. *“My heart is tied with an elastic: as soon as I give it, it comes back to me”*. Thus spoke a man who wanted to make me understand his selfishness. It is difficult and draining to give oneself to others and be always available to them: available to give them some practical help, no doubt, but first and foremost to provide the far superior service of an attentive, understanding and encouraging heart that is reliable, knows how to speak the truth and dares to be demanding.

There is a yet more precious gift. Very few are those who go that far. I am referring to God’s life in us that is our principal wealth and which we are so reluctant to share. Whether that is out of reserve or bashfulness or human respect, the fact remains that this life remains locked up in each of us. *“From his heart shall flow floods of living water,”* said Christ *“speaking of the Spirit which those who believe in him were to receive”* (Jn 7: 38-39). But his disciples close the floodgates. An increasing number of teams have adopted for a year or two what we call the meditative method of gospel reading. Many have acknowledged that a much greater union has resulted, precisely because members are invited to reveal in a brotherly way what they have understood, as they prayed over the chosen page of the gospel.

There is a perfect Christian way of giving that is sacrifice: *“No one has greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”* (Jn 15: 13). Team life often requires that we sacrifice our taste, our will or our personal preferences. To give up in the face of a demand is to fail in love; it is to turn down the greatest benefit we can draw from a team, namely: that it makes us die to ourselves. Christ rises again in those who die to themselves. A team is in jeopardy when its members loose the spirit of sacrifice.

Henri Caffarel - Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame, April-Myi 1957

WHAT DIVERSITY THERE IS IN THE DEPTH OF PEOPLES’ HEARTS within certain teams!

- Some join more or less drawn by their spouse and to please him/her.
- There is the couple, recently arrived in the town, who are happy to make new acquaintances.
- There is this other couple who join “because you have to do something”.
- You also frequently come across the case of a couple who are attracted by the hope of finding support for their married life.
- And even, in certain towns, it is well thought off to belong to Teams.
- And then there is those who have no reason for belonging; they only still keep coming so as not to hurt their fellow team members by leaving.

But I say that none of these motives justifies a couple’s presence in a team. Some of them are not bad in themselves, but none is the true one; none corresponds to the reason for the Movement’s existence. It is normal for one or other of these motives to accompany the true one, but none should be the determining motive.

The only true motive, that which corresponds to the objective of Teams, is the will to know God better, to love him better and to serve him better. A couple joins Teams for God and remain in them for God. The motive for joining and the motive for remaining is religious, that is to say it relates to God.

Father Caffarel – Editorial to Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame ; December 1962

Testimony

Father Caffarel's total attention to the world and to events in it was centred on his fundamental passion for leading people to Christ. He was quick to grasp the new future shoots that appeared here and there.

Faced with society's de-christianisation, he turned to Teams. At the 1970 Rome gathering, he addressed a pressing call to them to become witnesses of the Living God. Being the practical person that he was, he complemented this call by suggesting specific means of responding to it: the Word of God, Contemplative Prayer and Asceticism. Added to the other 'endeavours', these practices would strengthen the spiritual life of couples and make them able to bear witness to their faith.

He thought that the vitality of Christian couples was a great grace given by Christ to the Church in the 20th century and that Teams had "a providential role to play in the Church". I can do no better than to quote the text he sent to Annick and me for an introduction to a compendium of his writings on Equipes Notre-Dame. To help people understand his words, he referred to the rise of Franciscan spirituality during the 12th century in a Christianity corrupted by "the love – not to say the worship - of money". "It was", he said, "*like a great wind blowing on Christianity from the open sea*".

He went on to say that, "*in our 20th century, another evil has arisen that permeates everything, perverting people's thinking and way of life*". We call it "*sexual liberation*". What an irony! Far from being liberated, our western society is enslaved and undermined by this evil (as well as panic-stricken by the rising tide of Aids). It will not be long before co-habiting men and women outnumber married couples, divorces outnumber marriages and abortions outnumber births. And when the rafters are eaten away by termites...

Is it not the providential mission of Teams, affirmed from their very beginning, to bring together couples who dare live out without compromise the Christian ideal of love, sexuality and marriage?" He concluded: "*Is it not possible to think that we will then see a great purifying wind blowing on the People of God? And men and women – at least the most lucid among them – will understand that only Christ can heal the great human realities, especially marriage and, through it, save our civilisation threatened with shipwrecked – but time is short*"

J and A Allemand (END France)

***You who are at home in the depth of my heart
May your joy rise up in the depth of my heart***

Chapter 6



There can be no Christian life that is not demanding

“In your love and in your mission as a couple be personally demanding and you will not disappoint”

Meditation

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Mt 10: 34).

“No one can serve two masters; he will either love the one and hate the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Mt 6: 24).

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 19: 24).

“No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God” (Lk 9: 62).

“Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead” (Mt 8: 22).

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Mt 5: 29).

“Then he said to them all, if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9: 23).

“None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions” (Lk 14: 33)

“For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life and there are few who find it” (Mt 7: 14).

(Quotations from the Gospel on which is based the extract from Father Caffarel’s editorial of November 1963 given below under “Chosen Texts”)

Introduction

If there is a word that appears frequently in Father Caffarel’s writings and pronouncements, it is the word “demanding”. In numerous texts, he expresses his profound conviction that human beings must respond to God’s total love for humanity by a demanding love. Christian life is demanding: it is the way of the Cross. It calls for personal discipline and an ongoing training in prayer and contemplation to which Father Caffarel submitted himself and

which he wished that Christians adopted for no other reason than to respond to God's immense Love. Throughout Father Caffarel's writings one finds this common theme of demand, asceticism and of the duty of obedience. It makes him sometimes appear austere, hard and insistent on the exercise of the will in combating current laxity. He lived out this demanding way through a life totally offered to Christ in unconditional love. He applied it to couples of Teams by introducing the Charter and its "obligations". He did not like sluggishness, peace on easy terms and self-satisfaction. He demonstrated his concern for the importance of prayer in the way he ran the "House of Prayer" at Troussures. He wanted participants to be unreservedly animated by a determined will and firm decision. To seek Christ and to help every person to discover Christ living in them was his obsession and explains his firmness.

Chosen Texts

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE DEMANDS OF CHRIST GO TERRIBLY FAR (cf texts of meditation above). Did Christ, therefore, only speak to discourage people of good will?

Indeed, in offering us this ideal in all its blinding starkness, he does intend us to adjust our life to it; but he also - and first of all - wants us to face up to our way of thinking about these demands and of living with them so that we can discover what it is in us that rejects and gainsays them so that we may be aware of our condition as sinners.

And isn't this what troubles us most cruelly? We have such a great need to be satisfied with ourselves and to give ourselves full mark; yet, if we open the Gospel, we are bound to condemn ourselves. But this is precisely what Christ wants us to face up to. The Publican's attitude does not readily come to us: "*God, be merciful to me a sinner*" (Lk 18:13).

To discover that we are sinners and that we cannot liberate ourselves, however much we may wish to do so and therefore to recognise that we have an imperative need of a Saviour, such is the first conviction that Christ wants to awake in all people. Let those who will not allow Christ do so, not claim that they have already committed themselves to follow him.

True, the evangelical ideal is difficult to achieve but if, first of all, we accept, believe and acknowledge how far we are from this ideal and sincerely want to conform our life to it, then the Lord's grace will come to our help. It has achieved many other miracles! "*Nothing is impossible to God*"; and so discouragement is inappropriate.

If, however, we have no desire to be turned away from self-love and from our high opinion of ourselves, let us take care not to open the Gospel. It is a terribly disquieting little book. By this I mean that it disturbs our peace of mind and gives it a hard time.

Extract from Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame; November 1963

You will find the CHARTER OF EQUIPES NOTRE-DAME attached to this letter (*). It is a great event in the history of our groups of couples. We would not want to say that this Charter, in its present form, is perfect. We are convinced of the

contrary; but it is a response to the wishes of many groups, expressed these last few years, for a clear and firm orientation and for a robust framework. This is precisely what this Charter seeks to give you.

Go ahead! It is not a question of discussing it, but to live by it. Experience will show the modifications that need to be made to this rule.

As they read it, many of you will think that it does not introduce anything particularly new. This is good; it proves that it is based on what you have experienced and that it is not some far fetch mental exercise.

After reading it and meditating on it, apply it. It may then be that, despite appearances, it seems to you terribly demanding - not because of extraordinary obligations, but because it requires that everything that has more or less been done before, be well done from now on. Is it not in your daily life and in small things that you educate your children? Similarly, it is in applying yourselves to follow faithfully the obligations of this rule that you will help yourselves and friendly couples to live out always better and more perfectly your vocation of spouses, parents and human beings.

Had it been less demanding, this Charter would perhaps have suited a greater number; but we deliberately refused to devalue its spirit and discipline for we did not want to disappoint so many couples, especially among the younger ones, who are looking for a tough law that will help them to live out a virile form of Christianity.

Do not apply this Charter grudgingly. There is nothing dishonourable in a couple or a group resigning; but let those who adopt it, do so without reticence but resolutely.

We have exercised our responsibility; pray, reflect, exercise yours.

** The Charter is not included in this booklet*

Extract from Monthly Letter of Teams - January 1948

A TEAM MEETING that is not first of all an effort to encounter Jesus Christ is something totally other than a Teams of Our Lady meeting. Besides, to be lovingly demanding is not so much a matter of making every effort to correct someone else's faults (as every educator knows) than to stir in someone's heart a growing generosity for God and neighbour, as one fans the flames of a fire.

Finally, may your love be patient with the patience of farmers who put their trust in the seasons. Then, your demanding love will bear fruits.

"If your love makes no demands on me, it diminishes me; if your demands are without love, they outrage me. If you are impatient in your demands on me, you discourage me; if your love is demanding it makes me grow". When couples practise fraternal love, their heart expands little by little. Then, stage-by-stage, their love spreads to the home, to the neighbourhood, to the country... until it reaches the most distant shores...

- Where Christians love one another, there the Church is - provided, however, that this small community wants to be close to the Church and devoted to its service.
- The power of intercession of Christians, when they are united, is of extraordinary power: *"If two of you consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them"* (Mt 18: 19-20).

- Fraternal love is of exceptional fruitfulness. All around, evil retreats and the desert begins to bloom.
- A fraternal community is a message from God to humanity. It is his most important message: that which reveals God's intimate life: his Trinitarian life. There can be no more eloquent and persuasive discourse on God than the sight of Christians who "are one" as the Father and the Son are One.

May it be your obsessive aim: *To make your team a success in charity.*

L'Anneau d'Or ; May – August 1956 ;

Testimony

We invite you to experience, for a couple of minutes, the electro shock treatment that our team experienced just as it completed the two years of initiation to the Movement and as it studied selected writings of Father Caffarel for a year. Are you ready? So, let's start !

With regards to team life

Are you happy about joining Teams?

- *You, wives, because you are finally hoping to be able to communicate with your husband?*
- *You, husbands, because it pleases your wife.*

Well, for his part, Father Caffarel tells you: "The only true motive - that which corresponds to the purpose of Teams - is the will to know God better, to love him better and to serve him better. We join Teams for God; we stay in them for God".

With regards to prayer

At every sharing on the endeavours as a team, you easily find new excuses - with the help of your fellow team members - for finding it impossible to make time, as lay people, to pray regularly on your own or as a family.

Father Caffarel tells us: "Those who say to me: 'But where do you expect us to find time to pray?' make me wonder. Either they have not understood the vital importance of prayer for supporting religious life or it is a case of aversion... It is all a matter of knowing if it is vital to eat; it is all a matter of knowing if it is vital to pray."

After these few words, if you are happy and satisfied that Father Caffarel's words do not concern you, he has another message for you: "Woe to you virtuous, zealous, austere, heroic people if you are self-satisfied, if you do not know yourself to be a sinner, if you are not looking for the Saviour and calling on him."

All these words of Father Caffarel have not left our team indifferent. Reactions were lively: some were shocked, in revolt, troubled. We can testify today, however, that those who were most deeply affected are those who have since drawn most benefit from his words for their Christian life.

If Father Caffarel's demands on couples strike you, it is because they are firm and non-accommodating, as were Christ's demands on his apostles. So don't hesitate: allow yourselves to be deeply stirred by his radicalism, his ardent spirit and his love.

Hina and Olivier Lefrançois (Teams France)

***You who are at home in the depth of my heart
I offer myself to your love in the depth of my heart***

Chapter 7



Apostles open to the realities of the world

“And then, roll up your sleeves; join all those who try to build a world in which the new generation will be able to breathe and to live without being overwhelmed by the huge problems facing humanity as a result of the breathtaking progress of science and technology.”

Meditation

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God, which promised before hand through his prophets in the holy scripture, the Gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 1: 1-7).

Introduction

Father Caffarel's attentiveness to Christ living in him only found its true expression in his concern for others - to Christians that had been entrusted to his ministry. His first concern was to respond to the questioning of young couples by creating the Equipages Notre-Dame and then to the questioning of widows by founding the Fraternities of Our Lady of the Resurrection. He urged team members to bear in mind couples of the wider world, not only by expanding Teams into numerous countries but also in giving support to the work of preparation for marriage and in helping parents, couples and young people in their emotional and sexual life. Numerous works of research and of reflection bear witness to this.

Father Caffarel was a true missionary in the world in which he lived and constantly reminded people of the concern that they must have for their apostolic duty. His experience with couples made him a valuable contributor to the work of the Second Vatican Council. He did not hesitate to raise in Rome what he saw, felt and was concerned about.

Seeing that the world was de-christianised, with no relationship with God, led him to create 'Schools of Prayer' at the retreat house at Troussures and in the Movement of Intercessors. Having soon understood the future place of the laity in the life of the Church, he was not only concerned about their spiritual formation but constantly reminded them of the apostolic dimension of their Christian life.

Chosen Texts

I WILL NOT SPEAK TO YOU OF THE DUTY OF THE APOSTOLATE IN GENERAL I simply want to invite you, during this year that is beginning, to do everything you can for the married and family spirituality that you get from Teams to reach couples around you. May it strengthen their union that is perhaps breaking up. May it reanimate their love and reveal to them the riches of their sacrament of marriage. May it help them also to know the joy and strength that comes from fraternal friendship between couples.

Are you short of the necessary ardour? Are you not aware to what extent the ambient culture in which they live threatens the Christian life and union of so many couples?

But do not tell me that there is nothing to be done. If you really care for all these threatened couples that are short of love and grace, you will know how to invent what needs to be done and you will persevere in your efforts. Inventiveness, perseverance, such are the qualities of missionaries. How numerous are the missionaries who struggle, preach and persevere for years without result! Well, yes indeed, be the missionaries of this married spirituality that gives you life.

Henri Caffarel - Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame ; October 1950

CHRISTIAN COUPLES HAVE DIFFICULTY IN OBSERVING GOD'S LAW in the area of conjugal morality. There is nothing surprising about this bearing in mind both the demands of the law and the strength of the sexual instinct. But what is not normal is that such a great number of them (even among the best) should be overwhelmed by anxiety. What is the cause of this anxiety? These couples intend both to observe the moral law and to deepen their union. Yet, on the one hand, they are told that to break the law is to betray God, and, on the other hand, to abstain from sexual relationship is, they think, to compromise the stability of their union and the richness of their love. Since, in their eyes, the law of God and the deepening of their union are undeniable values, how could they not be anxious when they happen to sacrifice the one for the other? If only they could find enlightenment and support from the clergy! This is often not the case and the contradictory advice they receive only make their utter confusion greater.

It is inconceivable that children of God who are full of good will should live in a state of anxiety. If it is the case, it is because too many priests have an outsider's legalistic and static concept of morality. On the other hand, one observes that, if the principles involved are presented in the perspective of a deliberately evangelical morality and if couples are helped to apply them in a loyal and growing Christian life, these principles are seen as singularly beneficial and factors of progress in love and charity.

True, it is a burden sometimes, but for those who live in God's friendship, the "burden is light" (Mt 11: 30). Even so, it is important that the priest who counsels the couple should have given thought to the Christian meaning of sexuality and to the psycho-physiological stages of growing to maturity. What is true for priests is obviously also true for married lay people whom the Pope has expressly invited to help couples who are searching or who are in difficulty.

Please! May the Magisterium hasten to give to priests and to the faithful an outline of a pastoral teaching that will help married couple to adopt and apply, with a loyal and relaxed conscience, the principles enunciated in *Humanae Vitae*. Then, we will not have to wait long before we see that, by defending conjugal morality in its integrity, Pope Paul VI will have very effectively contributed to the advancement of the couple, to the establishment of a truly human civilisation and to the blossoming of the graces of the sacrament of marriage within the Christian people.

Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame; October 1968 supplement

IT IS A MATTER OF URGENCY THAT CHRISTIAN ADULTS SHOULD TRY TO UNDERSTAND YOUNG PEOPLE. I am not saying that one must, a priori, adopt all their ideas or applaud everything that they do. What is essential is to seek to find out from what depth of their being stems their aspirations, reactions, thoughts and doubts and to ask them questions about our behaviour that so often outrages them. No doubt it is a sign of moral and spiritual debility to spend one's time bringing into question all values handed down from the past and to reject all certainties. But, on the other hand, it is a sign of intellectual and emotional atrophy to refuse to re-examine so many habits of thought and behaviour that are all very questionable by-products of a particular civilisation or social background.

It is true that it is difficult to understand others and notably the new generation. We are so afraid of feeling the ground giving way under our feet. But are these props that we are so afraid may crumble, so vulnerable then? And if they are, does it not indicate that they lack a sound foundation?

Furthermore, in order to understand, one needs to love much and, first of all, to love those we want to understand. But we will only love them if we ourselves are in loving union with a spouse, a friend or a true team. Whoever is not loved is not able to love or understand. We need especially to know that God loves us; it is only this certainty that allows us not to be scared by theories or events, however troubling they may be, for God is stable and whoever leans on him is also stable...

You can contribute greatly in creating around you a mentality of understanding the rising generation. You are not short of the means to do so. Learn to approach those who control the mass media. Your letters are much more effective than you imagine. Write to publications that you can contact, take the initiative of calling meetings etc. And then, roll up your sleeves, join all those who are trying to build a world in which the new generation will be able to breathe and live without letting themselves be dominated by the extraordinary problems facing humanity due to the breathtaking progress of science and technology.

Adults are only worthy of being esteemed if they work for the real good of the rising generation and not for the comfort of the established generation. It is the

widespread disregard of this law by politicians, economists, trade unionists etc that is a great scandal because it is the great sin of adults against the love of children. Those who have not got the mentality of a father or of a mother have not reached adulthood. The alternatives are inescapable: either the children are sacrificed or parents sacrifice themselves for the children...

Do not run away from your responsibilities. Nevertheless, do not be overwhelmed by them. Assume them with confidence. The “strength from above” that Christ promised his disciples before leaving them, is guaranteed to you. If only, throughout the world, there were enough couples that were truly loving, truly happy, truly Christians, the face of this world would be really transformed.

Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre Dame, May–June 1971

Testimony

One home in four in France is that of a widow. It is far worse in poor countries. I was a spoilt young woman, but my husband died when I was 35. In my distress, I made a vital discovery, namely that it is impossible to make a success of one’s life alone; but for God all is possible. From the very beginning of my widowhood, I had the grace of knowing the Fraternity of Our Lady of the Resurrection. A few young widows, under the inspired guidance of Father Caffarel, founded the Fraternity in France in 1943. Marie-Françoise de Bouchemain and six other young widows heard God’s call and, independently, told Father Caffarel of their wish to consecrate themselves to Christ; they then went to the Grotto in Lourdes to entrust this wish to Our Lady.

Father Caffarel discerned in the coincidence of these independent approaches a call of the Holy Spirit. He strongly encouraged them to reflect on this matter and guided them over the years to live out the charism of their vocation. This was a truly prophetic intuition, occurring as it did half a century before the great crisis of the family. They wished to offer to God the sacrifice of their human love and of childbearing in order that couples should live out their married love in an authentic way and be generous in welcoming new life. In 1948, Cardinal Suhard recognised the authentic nature of their call “because”, he said, “of the conjugal character of your vocation, this ‘mystery of widowhood’ that you wish to live out, this love stronger than death that guides you and this offering of your life for couples”. This was a surprising mission for young widows, namely to pray and offer their life to God so that His Kingdom may grow in couples and families. This was a novel and mysterious fecundity for their seemingly parted couple.

Father Caffarel guided the Fraternity during 35 years.

O Macchi (Fraternité Notre Dame de Résurrection)

***You who are at home in the depth of my heart
Gather the universe in the depth of my heart***

Under Mary's protection

“Take Mary home as your wife”

Meditation

“This is how Jesus Christ came to be born: His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1: 18)



Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit; She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins”.

Now all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophets: “Look! The virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel a name which means God is with us”. When Joseph woke up, he did what the Angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home; he had not had intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son and he named him Jesus. Mat 1: 18-25)

Introduction

Father Caffarel found a model in Mary: the model of the relationship of a person with Christ, the model of perfect holiness. This led him to a very special devotion to the Virgin Mary - not a sentimental devotion - but rather a devotion based on a ‘Yes’ to God, an absolute and deliberate ‘Yes’, the hallmark of the whole of his life. He venerated Mary in her marriage to Joseph. In his eyes, together, they were the perfect example of the conjugal ‘Yes’ of everyday, the ‘Yes’ of the faithfulness of every moment. In an article on the marriage of Joseph and Mary, he honoured them as guides and examples of holiness. Through a theological treatise, he reminded the Church of this unique marriage. Arising from this study, he put forward the new idea that marriage is a path to holiness through the grace of its sacrament.

The consecration of Teams to Our Lady, as well as that of other movements that Father Caffarel guided, is the proof and a sign of the important place the Virgin Mary held in his spiritual life. For him, Mary is the Mother, the perfect example of solicitude, the perfect ‘Yes’ and the perfect and holy relationship with Christ.

Chosen texts

AND THIS IS WHY OUR TEAMS ARE CALLED “ÉQUIPES NOTRE-DAME”. I would be terribly sorry if you were to pay no more attention to this patronage than if you were looking for mystic connotations in such inscriptions as “Hôtel Notre-Dame” or “Garage Notre-Dame” or “Restaurant Notre-Dame” that ones sees a bit everywhere throughout France.

You come together to seek Christ, to imitate him, to serve him. You will not succeed without a guide and there is no better guide than Mary. I would like us, in our Teams, to nurture a faith in the all-powerful tender care of Our Lady and that every couple should experience the trust and security that little children feel in the presence of their mother. I would like this to be one of our characteristics – I would then have great confidence in the future.

*“And she took them under her protection and responsibility,
And in her care for all eternity” (Péguy)*

The Teams would then be protected from intellectualism and a criticising mentality. This is one of the first benefits of a Christian’s closeness to Mary. Hearts would be kept in humility – who would pretend to be clever in Our Lady’s company? Brotherly love would reign: this is always the case when mum is among her children... The spring of joy would then not run dry since the “Cause of our joy” would be among us!

I think that there may be some among you who listen to what I am saying with embarrassment; they have difficulty in understanding the very exceptional place given to Our Lady in Catholicism. (Catholics have hardly said the Our Father to Almighty God that they immediately turn to this wonderful young girl greeting her with a Hail Mary). People are concerned less this devotion is liable to sentimentalism rather than to reason.

I will not pretend that I can convince them by means of this short note! May they allow me, however, to share with them the best sermon on Our Lady that I have ever heard?

I had met a businessman who was exploring for oil in Morocco, in Arabia etc. He had factories everywhere. He was deeply Christian and he had just told me the great place that Our Lady held in his life. I wanted to understand why and I asked him: “Who is Our Lady for you?” To my surprise – and my embarrassment – I saw this virile man being moved, his eyes filled with tears as he replied “My Mother”. I immediately changed the subject, ashamed like someone who has unwittingly uncovered a secret love, yet happy as someone who has found out why our robust ancestors in the Middle Ages had such a veneration for Mary.

May our Teams as a whole be a cathedral to the glory of Our Lady. May we work at it with the vigorous enthusiasm of builders in the Middle Ages.

Henri Caffarel - Monthly Letter of Equipés Notre Dame, May 1949

THE WHOLE OF THE VIRGIN-MOTHER’S LIFE, COMMITTED BY THE ‘YES’ OF THE ANNONCIATION, was a continuous ascension of love. Hence, it is at her side that Christian couples would learn to utter for the first time, and thereafter throughout their life, their great ‘Yes’ of love. It is Mary, the model of the humble

servant's consent, who teaches their souls how to repeat and live out each day the 'Yes' of the first day. She teaches them how to keep very alive the burning flame of their first 'Yes', in the silence of their love, she "who pondered all these things in her heart". It is a demanding flame that tolerates no ashes but would rather consume them so as to rise higher and brighter. Love is only true if it perseveres. What is more, it is only true if it grows, if it becomes more pure and absolute. Its perfection does not lie in the exhilaration of the springtime 'Yes' that lips exchanged for the first time; it is in the weighed-down fullness of its fruits, late in the season, after much labour, pains and weariness. These are the 'Yes' of old age, in the evening of a life of faithfulness, that express the perfect consent of two beings to each other and completes the union that is its achievement and reward...

Not only will the Virgin Mary teach husbands and wives to live out this mystery of the 'Yes' - of an ever fuller 'Yes' - but she will, first of all, reveal that none of us can say 'Yes' truly to another if we have not first of all said 'Yes' to God. This is because, if we give our consent to God, we receive the grace to share in the power of divine love and we can, in all sincerity, say: "the strength with which I love you, is no different from that by which you exist" (Claudel). It is the very love of God that acts through our heart to reach another heart. The more fully we consent, the more generously we open ourselves, the more will divine love be a gushing and inexhaustible spring in us ...

The couple also, both husband and wife, must say 'Yes' to God... The Virgin Mary gave birth to the Head; the couple give birth to the members. The couple experiences with wonder that, when they join their 'Yes' to that of Mary, they collaborate with her and play their part in giving Christ to the Father and to humanity...

I suggest to couples that they invoke Our Lady of the 'Yes'. If they want her, the consenting mother, to be intimately present in their home, she will teach them how to consent and will watch over their love...

L'Anneau d'or; May 1956

THE COUPLE OF NAZARETH IS THE MODEL FOR ALL COUPLES; their marriage is founded by Christ and on Christ. It is an example with a message of hope. Provided Christian couples do not turn their back on the divine teaching working in their life as it was in Mary and Joseph, God will lead them "*with mighty hand and outstretched arm*" (Deut.4: 34) to the promised land where he awaits them. Marriage will then have been for them a way to holiness.

But then, as I write these lines I think of so many couples whose love is sick, their union in tatters, their hearts torn. Are they as far from the couple in Nazareth as they imagine? No, they are their poor infirm children. They must not fear of being less loved because less fortunate or for being sinners, perhaps. They must humbly acknowledge their poverty and it is not impossible that Mary or Joseph will turn to their Son and, as Cana, will say to Him: "They have no wine, they have exhausted their provision of love".

It is by constantly reverting to the marriage of Joseph and Mary that, for ten centuries, theology has sought and finally found the basis of the doctrine of Christian marriage - so new by comparison with all other theories on marriage. Why should it not also draw from it today the new enlightenment that new problems demand?

How is it that marriage and family spirituality - understood as a way of Christian living and of sanctification in and through marriage - does not look to the couple of Nazareth for its guiding principles?

Nevertheless, Christian couples should not limit themselves to a servile imitation: only a work of reflection enlighten by faith will help them to find the right behaviour and action.

Blessed are the couples humble enough to decide not to lose sight any more of this home where Christ grew.

Take Mary home as your wife, p176-177

Testimony

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, in union with all our Christian brothers and sisters, we have come to Lourdes to tell you our great joy and pride for the wonderful privilege of your Immaculate Conception that was proclaimed a hundred years ago.

We were also keen to express the gratitude of our generation for the immense grace of becoming aware of the greatness of Christian marriage. We are well aware that all graces come from Christ who died and rose again for us. It is therefore to Him, first of all, that we express our gratitude. But we also know that you were present at the foot of the Cross, partaking in his sacrifice, offering your Son for us and for our children. It is therefore right that, in expressing our gratitude, we do not separate ourselves from Him from whom you never separated yourself.

Our pilgrimage to Lourdes has yet another objective that is close to our hearts. Seven years ago, Father Caffarel entrusted us to your patronage, just like parents who lay their little baby on your altar after their baptism. We were anxious to ratify this consecration. The time has now come to do so. All of us here present, in our name and in that of all members of Equipes Notre-Dame who were not able to be with us, we give you, without reservations or conditions, our Movement and all the couples that make it up, as a homage of our love and trust. It belongs to you. You can dispose fully of it for the glory of your Son. We agree with all that you will ask and do.

After having heard Jesus say “Here is your mother”, St John took you into his own home. The homes of all Team members are open to you, Mary – come and live with us. Help us to know your Son. Help us to love and imitate him. Watch over our children and cause numerous priestly and religious vocations to arise among them. May your prayer obtain for our families the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit – as it did for the apostles gathered in the Upper-Room. May we not fail, henceforth, to go out and proclaim the wonders of God, as did the apostles, and especially the wonders of the sacrament of marriage to those who do not know them.

Words of consecration of Teams in Lourdes read by Constantin Sipsom – Pentecost 1954

***You who are at home in the depth of my heart
May you be praised, Lord, in the depth of my heart***

Conclusion



Father Caffarel, a prophet for our times

Paul-Dominique Marcovits, o.p.- Postulator

Jesus said to them:

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.

Do you not say: 'Four months more then comes the harvest?'

But I tell you: 'Look around you and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting'." (Jn 4: 34-35)

Jesus, in his strength and peace, came to do the will of the Father. His whole life, his very breath was to accomplish the works of the Father. These works will soon be fulfilled. The Samaritans, first among pagan nations, will believe in him and confess: "He is truly the Saviour of the world".

As we recall the vigour and ardour of Father Caffarel, the light emanating from his presence and his diminutive and fragile physique, we remember that his food was to do the will of God. He hungered after this. When Cardinal Lustiger called him a "prophet for our times", he was not saying that Father Caffarel was predicting the future - No. A prophet is one who seeks the will of God, someone whose passion is to discern God's plan unfolding in the hearts of human beings and in the events that take place. A prophet is also one who does everything to facilitate the fulfilment of God's plan in the world. Such, fundamentally, was Father Caffarel.

All those who knew him and who were guided by him in their spiritual journey say how penetrating was the way he looked at people, not in an indiscreet way, but in a deep and respectful way. He looked for God in every person. Such was his joy and that of those who found peace as a result. Father Caffarel helped all to put themselves in the presence of God and to welcome his will. He respected people's freedom. He wanted to give to everyone a food that did not run out. To someone who was shattered by a terrible ordeal, he simply said: "Go to mass every morning". This person did so and weathered all the storms of her life. Father Caffarel put her in God's hands. Someone else to whom he gave advice on quiet prayer has, for the past thirty years, been faithful to quiet prayer and has kept her serenity in spite of trials throughout her life. As a prophet, Father Caffarel showed everyone what God expected of them.

It was in 1939 that the first couples came to see Father Caffarel to ask him to help them to find the way to holiness in marriage. His response was: "Let us seek together". A prophet is first and foremost a pragmatic person: He learns from events; he sees that God's grace seeks to clear a path for itself and he does everything to facilitate its growth. Being pragmatic, Father Caffarel was constantly thinking, reflecting and reacting to events or to a specific request. He saw when a grace manifested itself. Thus it was that Equipes Notre-Dame, the Movement for Widows and the Fraternity of Our Lady of the Resurrection came into being. His food was to do the will of the One who sent him. If he

was demanding, even in the smallest details, it was because of his gift of discernment in faith. He saw what God wanted and that we had simply to conform to it.

A prophet is always a little disturbing for those who settle easily for the “near enough”. He brings people back to the essential without compromise. At the same time Father Caffarel was humble in what he did since everything comes from God. It was in 1987, forty years after the founding of Equipes Notre-Dame, that he dared refer to its “founding charism”. “A *‘founding charism’ is something totally else than a good idea or an edifying thought. It is an inspiration of the Holy Spirit that will be a dynamic force guiding an institution throughout its long development and helping it to fulfil its mission*”. (Conference given in Chantilly on the 3rd of May 1987). Father Caffarel was in admiration at the work of God spreading around the world.

Prophets do not come and go. Because they do not predict the future but are servants sent to walk ahead and prepare the way of the Lord, what they have to say is always relevant. Father Caffarel did a lot for the Church and worked wonders. Nevertheless, a ‘new job’ awaits him... He will be more and more present in the lives of men and women who want to pray and to love. His writings have not aged. The recording of his conferences and talks played on the radio have an impact on us. We too are put in the presence of God. Is it due to the magic of words or of well-chosen expressions? Not-at-all! But it is the relevance of what he says to our seeking, to our doubts and to our hopes. God’s grace comes through this Servant of God and touches us intimately. Try reading aloud a text by Father Caffarel... He is there, speaking to you. Those who do not know him become enthusiastic. Yet what he says is to the point, without unnecessary adjectives. He says the essential, nothing else. Father Caffarel is living.

The mystery of a human being is God’s secret. Yet it all began for Father Caffarel, as he often said, in March 1923 when he was twenty years old. This was his ‘prophetic vocation’: “*Suddenly, Jesus Christ became Someone for me. Oh! Nothing spectacular. On this distant day in March, I knew that I was loved and that I loved, and that henceforth, between Him and me, it would be for life. The die was cast*”. He experienced love and two rivers could then flow from his ministry:

1. Love of God and for God in prayer and contemplation and
2. Love of God in marriage, widowhood as well as in the priestly vocation.

Very early on, God prepared him to be a master of the way of love. And yet, Father Caffarel himself was secretive, reserved, almost solitary... This is normal: God always acts within our limitations and weaknesses.

May Father Caffarel still guide us today in discovering the will of God. God always wants us to live in his presence in the footsteps of Christ and in the communion of the Holy Spirit. Let us be full of hope. Let us look at the fields turning gold for the harvest.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FATHER CAFFAREL

- *L'amour plus fort que la mort* (Love stronger than death), with A.-M. CARRE, L. LOCHET, A.-M. ROGUET, Paris, Cerf, Coll. Foi Vivante, 1958
- *Amour, qui es-tu ? Grandes pages sur l'amour d'écrivains contemporains* (Love, who are you? Great pages on love by contemporary writers) presented by *Henri Caffarel*, Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1971
- *Aux carrefours de l'amour* (At the crossroad of love), Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1980 and Paris, Parole et Silence, 2001
- *Camille C. ou l'emprise de Dieu* (Camille C or the grip of God), Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1982
- *Cinq soirées sur la prière intérieure* (Five evenings on interior prayer), Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1980 and Paris, Parole et Silence, 2003
- *Dieu, ce nom le plus trahi, Anthologie* (God, this most betrayed word - an Anthology), Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1980
- *Lettres sur la prière* (Letters on prayer), Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1960
- *Nouvelles lettres sur la prière* (New letters on prayer), Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1975 and Paris, Parole et Silence, 2006
- *L'oraison. Jalons sur la route* (Contemplative prayer, stages on the way), Paris, Parole et Silence, 2006 (new-edition of a brochure by Editions du Feu Nouveau)
- *La pensée de Paul VI sur Sexualité, Mariage, Amour* (The thoughts of Paul VI on Sexuality, Marriage and Love), Introduction and notes by Canon H. Caffarel, Integral Text of the Pope's address to Equipes Notre-Dame 4th May 1970, Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1970
- *Le portrait spirituel de Camille C* (The spiritual portrait of Camille C.), Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1982
- « *Prends chez toi Marie, ton épouse* » ("Take Mary home as your wife"), Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1983 and Paris, Parole et Silence, 2005
- *Présence à Dieu. Cent lettres sur la prière* (In the presence of God, one hundred letters on prayer), Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1967 and Paris, Parole et Silence, 2000
- *Propos sur l'amour et la grace* (Talk on love and grace), Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1954
- *Le renouveau charismatique interpellé. Etudes et Documents* (The charismatic renewal challenge, Studies and Documents), with J.-R. BOUCHET, Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1976
- Introduction to: O. de LA BROSSE, *Saint François de Sales*, Paris, Cerf, 1967
- Introduction to : Th.R. KELLY, *Mon expérience de Dieu* (My experience of God), Paris, Feu Nouveau, 1970

Jean ALLEMAND :

- *Les équipes Notre-Dame. Essor et mission des couples chrétiens* (Equipe Notre-Dame, Expansion and mission of Christian couples) , Paris, Equipes Notre-Dame, 1988
- *Henri Caffarel. Un homme saisi par Dieu* (Henri Caffarel. A man gripped by God), Paris, Equipes Notre-Dame, 1997
- *Prier 15 jours avec le Père Caffarel, fondateur des Equipes Notre-Dame* (Pray for 15 days with Father Caffarel, founder of Equipes Notre-Dame), Paris, Nouvelle Cité, 2001

Gérard et Marie-Christine de ROBERTY :

- *A la rencontre, Père Henri Caffarel* (Encounter with Father Henri Caffarel), Mesnil Saint-Loup, Editions Le Livre Ouvert, Coll. Paroles de Vie, 2007

OH YOU

Oh You who are at home in the depth of my heart
Let me join you in the depth of my heart

Oh You who are at home in the depth of my heart
I adore you, my God, in the depth of my heart

Oh You who are at home in the depth of my heart
May you be praised, Lord, in the depth of my heart

Oh You who are at home in the depth of my heart
I offer myself to your love in the depth of my heart

Oh You who are at home in the depth of my heart
May joy rise up in the depth of my heart

Oh You who are at home in the depth of my heart
Keep me from all harm in the depth of my heart

Oh You who are at home in the depth of my heart
Let me live by you in the depth of my heart

Oh You who are at home in the depth of my heart
I want what you want in the depth of my heart

Oh You who are at home in the depth of my heart
Open me to the world in the depth of my heart

Oh You who are at home in the depth of my heart
Glorify your holy Name in the depth of my heart

Oh You who are at home in the depth of my heart
Abyss of light in the depth of my heart

P. Henri Caffarel