

# BULLETIN



## OF THE FRIENDS OF FATHER CAFFAREL

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## CONTENTS

- Editorial “Seventy Years Later”  
Edgardo & Clarita Bernal p. 4
- A Word from the roman Vice-Postulator of the Cause  
for canonisation  
Update on the State of the Cause p. 7
- News from the Association of the Friends of Father Caffarel  
Activities of the Association’s Correspondents in the  
French-Speaking Africa Super-Region p. 9
- News from the Association of the Friends of Father Caffarel  
Activities of the Association’s Correspondents in the  
Central Mexico Region p. 13
- News from the Association of the Friends of Father Caffarel  
Activities of the Association’s Correspondents in the France-  
Luxembourg-Switzerland Super-Region p. 14
- News from the Association of the Friends of Father Caffarel  
Treasurer’s Report for the 2022 Financial Year p. 16
- Father Caffarel’s Archives  
“Mary and Her Vocation,”  
*L’Anneau d’Or*, special issue “From Eve to Mary  
or the Destiny of Women,” n° 57-58, May-August 1954,  
excerpt p. 19
- Prayer for the Canonisation of Father Caffarel p. 24
- Honorary Members of the Association of the Friends  
of Father Caffarel p. 25
- Membership Renewal Form p. 27

## EDITORIAL

**Clarita & Edgardo Bernal**

*(Responsible Couple in the International  
Leading Team of Teams of Our Lady)*



## Seventy Years Later

Dear Friends of the Association of the Friends of Father Caffarel,

This editorial is the penultimate that we will write as president of the Association of Friends of Father Caffarel and as Responsible Couple for the International Leading Team of the Teams of Our Lady movement, because in July of this year, our mandate, which we received in 2018 during of the Fatima International Gathering, will come to an end and we will pass the baton to the new International Responsible Couple and a new International Leading Team, during the XIIIth International Gathering in Turin.

Seven years after the enactment of the Teams of Our Lady's founding charter, our founder, Father Henri Caffarel, called all members of the movement to make a pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Lourdes in June 1954, with the aim of consecrating the movement to the protection of Notre-Dame, in what was constituted as the 1st International Gathering of Notre-Dame Teams. There nine hundred members of the movement, both couples and counsellors, experienced a grand moment of communion, training and internationality, under the motto "The International Movement of Teams of Our Lady." At that time, our movement, after just 7 years of official life, like leaven in the dough, had experienced dizzying growth, going beyond French borders and reaching four other European countries, six African countries and a South American country.<sup>1</sup>

Seventy years after this first International Gathering, we have a new meeting, the XIIIth, this time in Turin, which will have the same character of a pilgrimage, with a movement which has expanded to the five continents with

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<sup>1</sup> Luxembourg, Switzerland, Belgium, Egypt, Brazil, Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritius, Senegal, Belgian Congo and Spain.

more than 156,000 members, spread over around 90 countries and in which the figure of Father Caffarel is more present than ever, if not physically, at least in all the richness of his spiritual heritage. This International Gathering occurs at a moment when the Cause of Canonisation that we undertook on April 25, 2006 has reached a decisive moment in which we pray that this Servant of God will be soon declared Venerable and, with the confirmation of a miracle, beatified.

In order to prepare the movement's first International Gathering, Father Henri Caffarel wrote an Editorial entitled "**The Path in Eight Stages**", published in the *Monthly Teams of Our Lady Letter*, in March 1954. We have taken some excerpts, transcribed hereafter, because their relevance to the preparation of the Turin 2024 Gathering.

Father Caffarel wrote, *"For centuries, a pilgrimage was a long and often perilous journey on foot, staff in hand, bundle on the shoulder. And the most admirable thing was not so much these long days of grueling walking, the dangers faced, the nights under the stars, but rather the robust faith to which all this testified, the growth of faith that all this encouraged.*

*In 1954, a few hours by train or plane can take us to Lourdes or Jerusalem. But let us make no mistake: today as in the past, the pilgrimage remains an act of faith, must be a testimony of faith, worth what the pilgrim's faith is worth. And if we are exempt from physical effort, we are not exempt from the effort of faith.*

*This is why we have invited you, not only on the journey to Lourdes, but to a long walk over eight stages: I want to talk about the eight study themes on the Mystery of Mary that were proposed for your meditation, for your effort of faith. An indispensable effort to achieve a clear view of God's magnificent design, at the center of which is Mary."*

Turin is a town that, although it has numerous religious sites, monasteries, churches, including the famous "Duomo di Torino e Cappella della Sacra Sindone,"<sup>2</sup> does not really have a pilgrimage sanctuary. The meeting will take place in a large event arena, the Pala Alpitour, and will include numerous moments of meditation and visits to the places where those

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<sup>2</sup>This church, according to tradition, houses the Holy Shroud, the authenticity of which has been the subject of numerous scientific studies and debates, even controversies which are not likely to worry people of faith like us, who, beyond of the fabric itself, look at what it represents in our faith values.

known as "social saints" lived."<sup>3</sup> This is why we consider that our founder's editorial, written seven decades ago, contains an equally valid appeal today, where, before and during our international meeting, we cannot be "exempt from the effort of faith." The Sanctuary is made up of each of the 8,500 participants who have confirmed their attendance, and who will meet during this Gathering, with prior preparation, that, like at the first meeting in 1954, will enable us to be in harmony with this living community of faith. We will make this time and this meeting a pilgrimage where, as the motto says,<sup>4</sup> we will go and return with an ardent and renewed heart, and where the study theme of this past year, The Eucharist, source of the mission, will be the culmination of the journey we have undertaken since Fatima 2018.

At the conclusion of this same editorial, Father Caffarel wrote, "*A righteous man of the Old Law, of whom I often dream, gave us this moving confidence, 'I got tired trying to get to know God.' We too get very tired, it's true. And often for causes that are worth it – this is still true. But how many of us could say in all truth that they get tired trying to get to know God, Mary, the whole world of grace? Well, I would like that this year, you do not hold back in tiring yourself to acquire this most precious gift for a Christian: a living faith.*

*I beg you, that your study themes on the Virgin are not just swiftly read, resulting in a short hastily written note, but rather are subjects of meditation, often and carefully taken up during the month.*

*So, at Pentecost, whether you go to Lourdes or whether you are held back by insurmountable difficulties, you will know the joy of the pilgrim who, with a shrug of the shoulder, throws their bundle at Our Lady's feet, looks up and gazes at her for a long time in silence."*

Dear friends of the Association of the Friends of Father Caffarel and Teams of Our Lady,

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<sup>3</sup> In the 19th century, Turin was a growing city, but many of its inhabitants lived in hardship. In this poor and degraded environment, however, there were those who strove to help them. The most famous is Don Giovanni Bosco, but he was not alone: there are also Cafasso, Murialdo, Frassati, Faà di Bruno and others. Canonised during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 2000s, they are called "social saints."

<sup>4</sup> The motto of the XIIth International Meeting is "Let's go with a Burning Heart," which evokes the missionary sense of the disciples of Emmaus, after having experienced the encounter with the risen Christ.

Whether or not you go to Turin 2024, be conscientious and carefully prepare spiritually, so that you will be able to say like the righteous one of the Old Law, "I have gotten tired trying to get to know God" and will arrive in Turin being able to throw your bundle where all the efforts and all the sacrifices that you have surely made to fulfil this great appointment are to be found, and you will be able to raise your eyes and contemplate the presence of the Lord and of Our Mother Mary, in this miracle and this gift of God: the Teams of Our Lady.

So be it,  
Your friends,

Clarita & Edgardo BERNAL  
International Responsible Couple, Teams of Our Lady

## In Service

*News from the Association of the  
Friends of Father Caffarel  
Update on the State of the Cause*

***Father Paul-Dominique Marcovits, o.p.***  
*Roman Vice-Postulator*

### ***The Cause is moving ahead!***

From November 9 to 11, 2023, I went with Marie-Christine Genillon to Rome to meet the new Roman postulator, Father Joseph Kijas who succeeded Father Angelo Paleri, of the same Franciscan order. Of course, since his appointment, we had been in contact with Father Kijas, but there we met him in person. It was a good meeting. He was well acquainted with everything concerning Father Caffarel and his cause for canonisation. To facilitate our collaboration, he named me "Vice-Postulator during the work on the Cause in Rome".



With the latter, we also met Father Stephan Praskiewicz, a Carmelite, Relator of Father Henri Caffarel's cause within the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. We had already met him previously.

Both of them received us warmly and with great interest in Father Caffarel's cause. Like us, they see the apostolic goal of the cause: to show the importance of marriage and interior private prayer. They are confident in the successful outcome of this cause.

This meeting was very useful. Firstly because we must always have personal and not just administrative relationships with those who work for the cause! It was also useful because it showed us concretely that it is indeed moving ahead.

The *Positio* - the text presenting Father Caffarel's life and work - is in the hands of the Theologian Consultors, who are currently reading it. When they have given their opinion, it will be the Cardinals' turn. If the opinion of the latter is positive, the Pope will then be able to sign a decree declaring Father Caffarel "Venerable". His beatification will then be possible. But on one condition: that God Himself ratifies the Church' opinion by performing a miracle through the intercession of Father Caffarel. And, if there is a new miracle, he will be canonised.

All this takes time. It is normal for it to be at the Dicastery's pace. We confidently hope for a favourable outcome of Father Caffarel's cause. It is very gratifying, for all the Teams of Our Lady members and for all the Friends of Father Caffarel, to see that "the cause is moving ahead."

Father Paul-Dominique Marcovits, o.p.  
*Roman Vice-Postulator.*



## In Service

*News from the Association  
of the Friends of Father Caffarel  
Activities of the Association's Correspondents  
in the French-Speaking Africa Super-Region*



*Bangui Teams members after the thanksgiving mass celebrated on September 19, 2021 on the occasion of the anniversary of Father Caffarel's death*

We are Prisca and Rodrigue BEKA BE NDONG, correspondents of the association Les Amis du Père Caffarel in the French-Speaking Africa Super-Region. We have been married for 16 years, and are originally from Gabon. We have been Teams of Our Lady members for 15 years, in the Libreville 25 Team. We have four children and we are both entrepreneurs. Between Father Caffarel and us, it has truly been a love story that began since the day we joined Teams of Our Lady. We were struck by the richness of his teachings. It is with joy that we strive to share them and make Father Caffarel known.

The French-Speaking Africa Super-Region is made up of eight Regions. To allow greater fluidity of actions to promote the cause of Father Henri Caffarel, the college of the French-Speaking Africa Super-Region (SRAF) in Dakar 2019 had decided to call for a correspondent couple in each region.

## **I – Composition of the Caffarel Team**

- 1) Amandine & Maximin GONÇALVES, correspondents for the Togo, Ivory Coast & Guinea
- 2) Josiane & Gilles Martin LONDJI, correspondents for the Cameroon-Chad Region
- 3) Edwige Fleur A. DOUGBE & Philippe A. ARAWO, correspondents for the Benin Region
- 4) Louise & André KIKONGO, correspondents for the Congo Region
- 5) Justine Estelle & Jean Francis Yannick GNAMBY LIKIKOUET
- 6) Prisca & Fulgence KANEZA, correspondents for the Rwanda-Burundi Region
- 7) Amanda & Constantin BODA, correspondents for the Central-Africa Region
- 8) Marthe & Gérôme DAKOUO, correspondents for the West Sahel Region (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Mauritania)

## **II – Organisation of the Correspondents' Work**

### **➤ At the Super-Region Level**

As SRAF correspondents, we coordinate the activities of the correspondents. To help correspondents understand their missions, we have provided them with a summary sheet presenting the Association and the correspondent's missions. We support correspondents through regular exchanges on the joys and challenges of the mission, the provision of information concerning the Association and the teachings of Father Henri Caffarel. The sharing we have allows us to express the concerns of the correspondents at the SRAF Colleges.

We suggested and obtained from the Super-Region Responsible Couple, the establishment, each year, of days to celebrate the life and work of Father Henri Caffarel: April 19 (anniversary of his ordination) and September 18 (anniversary of his death). On these days, with the agreement and support of the Regional Responsible Couples, thanksgiving masses are celebrated in the regions, preceded by a novena with the prayer for Father Caffarel's canonisation. Before each meeting, a reminder email is sent to regional correspondents.

Throughout the year, we encourage correspondents to participate in all activities organised by their Region and Sectors (Regional meetings, Sector days,) in order to present the Association, and encourage team members to seek Father Caffarel's intercession as well as to financially support the cause.

On the Super-Region Facebook page, we regularly publish the thoughts of Father Caffarel's thoughts, which we illustrate with pictures of those SRAF Team members who wish. These thoughts are also relayed in the different Regions via WhatsApp.

### **At the Regions Level**

The work of promoting Father Caffarel's cause is mainly done in the Regions among Teams' members. At this level, we commend the Correspondents' remarkable work. In addition to the activities already stated, two radio broadcasts were carried out in the Gabon and Congo regions:

- **March 2021:** broadcast on Radio Sainte Marie in the archdiocese of Libreville in Gabon on the life and work of Father Caffarel. The Gabon Association's correspondent, the head of the widows' association and the Intercessors' correspondent all participated in this broadcast.
- **March 2023:** broadcast on Radio Maria in Kinshasa on the theme of "Father Caffarel: a Prophet of Marriage and a Master of Prayer" on the occasion of the celebration of the Centenary of Father Caffarel's call. The correspondent of the Congo Region and a Spiritual Counsellor participated in this broadcast.
- Other broadcasts on Catholic media (radio and television) are in preparation, particularly in the Rwanda-Burundi and Cameroon-Chad Regions.

### **Other Activities**

- **February 2023:** Development with the agreement of the FR SRAF of a programme to celebrate the Centenary of Father Caffarel's call sent to regional correspondents.
- **March 2023:** Thanksgiving masses for Father Caffarel's call were celebrated in the regions. Participation of the Correspondent Couple at the SRAF college held in Lomé. The opportunity was given to us to thank the Regions for the support, to talk about the centenary of Father

Caffarel's call, to present the evolution of the cause, to remind everyone of what is expected of the Teams' members and to share some challenges and perspectives.

- **July 2023:** Invited by the Regional Responsible Couple, we participated in the national Teams of Our Lady meeting organised in Libreville from July 20 to 23. We endorsed the Gabon Region's correspondent's lecture on Father Caffarel's cause. We were also invited by the Responsible Couple for the Central Africa Region to talk about the request for Father Caffarel's canonisation during the National Meeting held from July 26 to 29 in Bangui.



*Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of Father Caffarel's Call,  
Kinshasa, Congo Region*

## In Service

*News from the Association of the  
Friends of Father Caffarel  
Activities of the Association's  
Correspondents  
in the Central-Mexico Region*

On the Facebook page of the Central Mexico Region <https://www.facebook.com/ENS.RMCN>, of the Hispano-America Super-Region, the entire Region, with weekly teams from each Sector, prays daily meditating the Holy Rosary and including texts by Father Caffarel. This has been the case since 2021 and in a more participatory and creative way since 2022. And as a Region, we continue this devotion permanently because as Teams of Our Lady, we have entrusted ourselves to the sponsorship, the precious intercession and the direction of Our Lady “the perfect ever Virgin”, Saint Mary.

In these prayers of the Rosary, we have presented as a general intention each of the stages of Father Caffarel’s canonisation process: first, that the preparation of the *Positio* be concluded promptly and satisfactorily; and after June 2022, that the study of the *Positio* will soon be concluded satisfactorily by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints of the Vatican, and that, on the basis of its opinion, the Pope can sign the "decree on the heroic character virtues" which will make Father Henri Caffarel “Servant of God” a “Venerable”. So we will continue to pray for the next steps, God permitting.

In each Mystery, multiple texts have been included that Father Caffarel said or wrote at different times and in different media, to disseminate his thoughts with which he continues to enrich all Team members, also through the means of the Holy Rosary.

Cecilia & Miguel Angel Vidal  
Correspondents for Central Mexico Region

## In Service

*News from the Association of the  
Friends of Father Caffarel  
Activities of the Association's  
Correspondents in the France-Luxembourg-  
Switzerland Super-Region*

### **Broadcast on the French Catholic television channel KTO**

Contact was made with KTO to suggest a programme on Father Caffarel. The agreement was made for the show called “Faith taken at its word” and Father Paul-Dominique Marcovits and Antoine and Camille Renaud participated. The show was recorded on April 24, 2023 and broadcast on May 14. It is still visible on the KTO website at <https://www.ktotv.com/video/00413440/pere-caffarel>.

### **Sharing the *Hundred Letters on Prayer***

Since 2021, we have been sending via email a letter from Fr. Caffarel’s book *Présence à Dieu. Cent lettres sur la prière* each week, with a few lines of introduction to a number of friends and members of our families. We currently have around fifteen recipients, including two French Teams of Our Lady, each at a different point in the book.

Danielle Waguët, the executor of Fr. Caffarel’s will, suggested we put these letters on the Hozana prayer website, and this is in progress. (<https://hozana.org>)

### **Welcoming Foreign Team Members at Troussures**

In the summer of 2023, we were asked twice to welcome foreign Team members wishing to worship in Troussures: the correspondent couple of the Friends of Father Caffarel for the Spanish-South American Super-Region on July 1, then the Responsible Couple from the Poland-Central Europe Super-Region coming to the end of their responsibility and the new Responsible Couple, as well as their Spiritual Counsellor, on July 19.

It should be noted that our Spanish counterparts organized in 2022 and 2023 a pilgrimage in the footsteps of Father Caffarel, with accommodation in Massabielle and travel to Paris and Troussures. Bertrand Dureuil, president of

the Massabielle Association, contacted us to organize pilgrimages of the same type.

### **Quotes from Father Caffarel on the French Teams of Our Lady Website**

During the first Covid lockdown, it was suggested to us that we propose quotes from Father Caffarel to put on the Teams' website. We did this daily during lockdown, and then every week from June 2020 onwards. When the site was redesigned, we noticed that these quotes were not really read, largely because they were not visible enough. It was decided to rework and repost them once the best way to present them has been determined.

### **Participation in END gatherings**

For the annual gathering of Sector and Regional Responsible Couples in Issy les Moulineaux (just outside Paris), the Friends of Father Caffarel Association was offered a stand. Some Sectors sometimes ask us to participate in their events in order to talk about Father Caffarel, during masses or sector days.

At the Lourdes gathering in November 2021, we were invited to organise a workshop on the theme "Taking care of your Team in the light of Father Caffarel's Thought." This one-hour workshop attracted around a hundred people.

Likewise, in September 2022, we represented the Teams movement, with François and Marie-Christine Genillon, in Troussures for the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Brothers of Saint-Jean's arrival in the house at Troussures. And there we talked about Father Caffarel and private prayer.

### **Network of Regional Correspondents**

It seemed fairly obvious to us that it was important to set up a network of regional correspondents alongside the regional Teams of Our Lady Responsible Couples. We suggested this to the ERFLS, but only two Regions gave us the names of correspondents.

Xavier & Marie-Armande de Thieulloy,  
Correspondents for France, Luxembourg & Switzerland

## **In Service**

*News from the Association of the  
Friends of Father Caffarel  
Except from the Association's  
Treasurer's Report for the Year 2022*

### ***Treasurer's Report – Financial Year 2022***

#### ***General Situation***

The year 2022 was marked in particular by the end of the preliminary postulation activity, the presentation of the final official documents to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican, with costs only linked to this event.

We received contributions that had been withheld by Super-Regions for several years, notably from Colombia and Hispano-South America.

Regarding the expenses incurred, it should be noted that the impact of the application fees for the cause corresponds to the amount budgeted.

Note that we had expenses linked to the putting in place of the on-line prayer novena, which had not yet been paid.

#### ***Balance Sheet of Ordinary Activities***

Father Marcovits and Marie-Christine Genillon continued the activities related to the preparation of documents relating to the postulation, including trips to Paris and Rome to meet the Relator at the Vatican.

Some comments and details on the accounts: During the year 2022, we did not have any book sales.

In essence, the year 2022 saw more expenses due to the presentation of documents to the Vatican, which corresponds to the very reason for our Association. Consequently, this year the result, which is negative from a financial point of view, must be considered positive because the route traced in previous years has reached its objective.



## **Balance Sheet for 2022**

<b>Revenue</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Budget 2022</b>	<b>2022 real</b>
Subscriptions	19 835	19 000	21 137,85
Sales		1 000	
Misc.	1 032,37		
<b>Total</b>	<b>20 867,37</b>	<b>20 000</b>	<b>21 137,85</b>
<b>Expenses</b>			
Trips & Testimonials		500	
Postulation	11 624,83	14 000	12 410,21
Direct Costs for the Cause			14 550
Office & Documentation Expenses		200	294,83
Bank Expenses	377,37	400	394,74
Web & IT Costs	3 569,86	3 000	6 377,32
Misc.			
<b>Total</b>	<b>15 572,06</b>	<b>18 100</b>	<b>34 027,10</b>
<b>Result</b>	<b>5 295,31</b>	<b>1 900</b>	<b>-12 889,25</b>

### **Origin of the Subscriptions: Revenue from Subscriptions**

<b>SR or RR</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
French-Speaking Africa	15	395	15	400	45
Belgium	150	125			
Brazil	15	15	6 255	1 315	
Canada	565	20	45		10
Colombia		15			3 645
Spain	5 040	10	30	12 075	15
France-Luxembourg-Switzerland	1 965	1 835	2 111	1 335	1 480
Hispano-North America		8 098	110	850	841
Hispano-South America					13 987
Mauritius		15			
Italy	155	30	80	225	195
Lebanon	45	250			
Oceania	2 233	501	215	15	
Poland	505		435	430	
Portugal	2 000	40		2 000	
Transatlantic	160		40	30	15
USA	655	195	1 290	1 160	905
<b>Total</b>	<b>13 503</b>	<b>11 544</b>	<b>10 626</b>	<b>19 835</b>	<b>21 138</b>

### ***Estimated Budget for the year 2023***

For the budget for the year 2023, we are suggesting modifications in relation to the budget of the previous year. In particular, we propose to be more cautious about the amount of memberships, and we propose to indicate an amount of costs linked to the reduced postulation activity, because for the moment the Association is not called upon to produce other documents.

<b><i>Revenue</i></b>	Budget 2022	Real 2022	Budget 2023
Subscriptions	19 000	21 137,85	16 000
Sales	1 000		
Misc.			
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>20 000</i></b>	<b><i>21 137,85</i></b>	<b><i>16 000</i></b>
<b><i>Expenses</i></b>			
Trips & Testimonials	500		
Postulation	14 000	12 410,21	6 500
Direct Costs for the Cause		14 550	
Office & documentation expenses	200	294,83	200
Bank expenses	400	394,74	400
Web & IT expenses	3 000	6 377,32	600
Misc.			
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>15 572,06</i></b>	<b><i>34 027,10</i></b>	<b><i>7 700</i></b>
<b><i>Result</i></b>	<b><i>5 295,31</i></b>	<b><i>-12 889,25</i></b>	<b><i>8 300</i></b>

Giovanni Cecchini Manara  
Treasurer  
Association of the Friends of Father Caffarel



## FROM FATHER CAFFAREL'S ARCHIVES

### **MARY AND HER VOCATION,**

*L'Anneau d'Or*, special issue "From Eve to Mary, or the Destiny of Women,"  
n° 57-58, May-August 1954, p. 231-324

We often say that women are absent from history. This is a very superficial view of things. It is true that the great names of history, those that it has retained, are above all the names of men: conquerors, founders of empires, heads of state, so much so that history, political, diplomatic, military, economic, even literary and artistic history, appears to us as the work of men alone. But if we look for who inspires them, supports them, stimulates them in their passions, their ambitions, their businesses, their conquests, the role of women then appears essential, often decisive.

There is another history, the great history, the spiritual history of humanity. And women play a leading role in it, culminating in two figures: Eve and Mary. A gesture by the former diverted the course of history from its source. A yes said to God by the latter determined the salvation of humanity.

However, let us be wary of popular imagery that takes pleasure in purely and simply opposing Eve and Mary. On the one hand, you have the woman who believes the treacherous angel's words and questions the divine word, disobeys in the hope of becoming like God and ultimately generates the river of suffering and sin which overwhelms the world. On the other hand, you have to one, who believes what is told to her on the Lord's behalf, who has no other ambition than to be his humble servant and becomes the plentiful source of all graces. If Mary is indeed, in a sense, the living antithesis of her unfortunate ancestor, she is also and primarily her glory, the daughter of the Promise, of this mysterious promise made by God in the form of a curse against Satan in

the presence of the sinful couple, *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head and you will strike his heel.”*

Adam and Eve, exiled from happiness, took this promise with them. It was their hope during the hard work, during the suffering of childbirth, in the most dramatic hour when, before the corpse of their son Abel, they measured the consequences of their sin. Their distant granddaughter was already the hope of these first sinners.

Millennia passed, generations followed generations before the promise was fulfilled. God is in no hurry. Or rather, God is not in the habit of assaulting his creation. Certainly, he could have made the Immaculate Virgin spring forth from a boorish people, as an admirable exception, a flower among the thorns. But that is not the way he works. He does not ask his creatures for fruit out of season; it respects the laws of maturing.

It is little by little, from level to level, that humanity has risen, driven by the powerful ferment of divine grace, towards more purity, towards more love, towards more holiness, towards Mary.

And firstly, among all of the earth's peoples, the Lord chose one with whom he made an alliance and whom he blessed. However, Israel increased its infidelities; so, God then “swept his domain with the great breath of war” and reserved his blessing for the “small remnant,” who returned purified by exile. But everything is quickly forgotten. Disasters and the lessons they contain. Therefore, divine blessing withdrew from the powerful amongst the people, the proud, the satisfied, to concentrate on this small Jewish elite without brilliance, without power, those who are called the “anawim,” the poor, the humble, the hungry. It was among them that God detected the person whose entire spirituality is contained in these words, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.”

Mary, the Pinnacle of Israel, the Pinnacle of Humanity.

She is a woman, she is the Woman. Her destiny is exceptional in that it combines the three aspects of a woman's vocation, virginity, marriage, motherhood, and brings them to an unrivalled degree of perfection. And this enables us to cite Léon Bloy's phrase, “The more holy a woman is, the more she is a woman.” In order to understand this destiny, we will look at Mary successively before God, Joseph, Jesus, and humanity.

Before undertaking this meditation, you must strip yourself of all intellectualism. The mystery of Mary eludes, in fact, those who want to imprison it in a few formulas and concepts. It is only revealed to a purified gaze. It means above all that the innocence of the eye must be rediscovered.

### **Mary's Virginity**

It would be a huge mistake to imagine Mary's interior life as immobile, motionless at a high altitude. A living person is never still, a dynamism constantly pushes them from within towards progress and self-surpassing, towards ever greater perfection. And so it is with Mary's spiritual life, whose inner source is charity, this love which comes from God and goes to God. From her birth onwards, Mary loved her God with a love that encountered neither hesitation nor rivalry within her. From stage to stage, this love will grow and intensify until the day she leaves the earth, having then acquired this unimaginable perfection that only its radiance in space and time can give us any idea of. Thus, the true story of Mary, the one that will never be written because it is the Lord's secret, is the story of her ascension into the love of her God. However, let us try to envisage the main stages of this evolution.

There is no risk of being mistaken in suggesting that meditation on the Word of God was the great factor in her progress in love. This meditation was familiar to any young Jew. Mary herself brought a unique purity of outlook and attentiveness of heart to it. So when, years later, a woman raising her voice in the crowd cried out before Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breast at which You nursed," he replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and observe it," meaning by this that his mother's glory is not so much of the order of the flesh as of the order of faith.

Acquaintance with Scripture introduces Mary to this lofty idea of God, who dominates all his people's thoughts and history. He is the Transcendent One, the Almighty, the Holy, the one who must neither be named nor represented in images, the one whose lordship is recognised by sacrifices, from the sacrifice of the early stages consecrating the first fruits of the earth to Him until to the holocaust which completely consumes the victim. He is the one who still prefers the entirely interior sacrifice of a pure and penitent heart than the immolation of goats and bulls. This theology is Mary's spiritual nourishment. How then can we be surprised that her wonderfully pure

childish soul sought what secret sacrifice she could offer to the Lord. And so she resolved to consecrate her virginity: in order to pay homage to the Holiness of God, in order to show Him her love, impatient to prove herself. The originality and scope of this gesture only appear clearly if we remember that, among the Jews, motherhood was not only a human glory for women, but the best proof of God's blessing on her. Virginity was the invention of the greatest love.

How old could Mary have been? The authors argue about it. Some think that she made this vow at a very young age, others that she had the desire very early on, but did not commit until her marriage. I would willingly join others who favour her teenage years, that age when every young girl fervently desires to be something for someone. When she discovered in her heart as a teenager the aspiration to marriage and motherhood, Mary undoubtedly understood that she could step away from it and thereby sacrifice the possibility of begetting the Messiah, that through this renouncing of the woman's human vocation, she would more truly become God's property, the thing which he disposes of it as he wishes.

A painting by an Italian painter intensely evokes this gift of the young Mary. She climbs the imposing Temple staircase alone. At the bottom are her parents, whom she just left, and they follow her with their gaze, while at the top the High Priest waits for her.

We can never overemphasize how much initiative, decision, and impetus there is in this gesture of the Virgin's, as indeed in her entire life. No passivity in her: everything is awake, in action. The most intensely alive human person. In a climate of peace, alacrity, flexibility, from which the slightest trace of tension is excluded - because tension is still a carnal weakness, whereas with her everything is very purely spiritual. Barely visible flames exist and they can be the most ardent ones.

Let us note that, with this offering, Mary pledges much more than herself: the people of Israel, and more broadly humanity whose miraculous child she is. She represents them, leads them, compromises them. In her, and through her, they consecrate themselves to the living God. "The ancient world," writes Bernanos, "the painful world, the world before grace cradled her for a long time against its desolate heart: centuries and centuries — in the obscure, incomprehensible expectation of a *virgo genitrix*.. . for centuries and

centuries, it protected with its old hands laden with crimes, with its heavy hands the wonderful little girl whose name it did not even know” — And here now these old, these heavy hands have just presented a spotless offering to the Lord.

We remember that for the daughter there is this great law of solidarity which worked in the opposite direction for the mother. Eve disobeys and her entire race was exiled from God. Mary gives herself and in her it is this same entire human race which offers itself to saving Love. God will be able to fulfil the ancient promises.

So here Mary inaugurated – one should say invented – the state of consecrated virginity. From now on, following her the Virgin *par excellence*, the Blessed Virgin, a multitude of women will commit themselves to this state which maintains in the Church a reserve of purity that the all of the faithful benefit from. But it is important not to confuse Christian virginity with the provisional situation of the young girl whose virginity has no spiritual significance. We must also be wary of two concepts which, taken separately, are inaccurate: one which is limited to the physical and sociological aspect (renunciation of marriage) of virginity, the other which only sees its spiritual aspect of consecration to God. We should not dissociate these two points of view, because they are complementary. Through the vow of virginity, the woman definitively consecrates her body to God and therefore renounces marriage, but this consecration takes on its full meaning from the fact that it is the sign of a consecration of the soul. That is to say, a detachment from creatures, just as Christ preached, and a full belonging to God in love. — If the state of virginity is not the vocation of every woman, this full belonging on the other hand is indeed the goal that every Christian soul must pursue. Consecrated virgins have the mission of reminding the faithful constantly tempted to forget this ideal of it, and this is what makes the greatness of their state and why the Church holds it in such high esteem. [...]

Henri Caffarel

## Prayer for the Canonisation of the Servant of God, Henri Caffarel

God, our Father,  
You planted deep in the heart of your servant, Henri Caffarel,  
A fountain of love, which bound him totally to your Son  
And inspired him with a wonderful capacity to speak of Him.

A prophet for our time,  
He revealed the dignity and beauty of the vocation of every person  
In the words Jesus addresses to each of us: "Come follow me."

He made couples enthusiastic about the greatness of the sacrament of  
marriage,  
The sign of Christ's fruitful love for the Church and of His union with her.  
He showed that priests and couples  
Are called to live a vocation of love.  
He was a guide to widows: love is stronger than death.  
Prompted by the Holy Spirit,  
He accompanied many Christians on the path of prayer.  
Seized by a devouring fire, he was a dwelling place for you, Lord.

God, our Father,  
Through the intercession of Our Lady,  
We ask you to hasten the day  
When the Church will proclaim the holiness of his life,  
So that people everywhere will discover the joy of following your Son  
In accordance with their particular vocations in the Holy Spirit.

God our Father, we invoke the intercession of Father Caffarel for.....  
(Indicate the particular favour being sought)

Prayer approved by Monsignor Andre Vingt-Trois – Archbishop of Paris.  
"Nihil obstat": 4th January 2006 – "Imprimatur": 5th January 2006.

*In the case of a particular favour obtained through the intercession of Father  
Caffarel, Contact: The Postulator,  
Association "Les Amis du Père Caffarel"  
49 rue de la Glacière – F 75013 PARIS*



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