



III^{ème} Rencontre Internationale des Responsables Régionaux
Roma 6-11 Septembre, September, Setembro, Septiembre, Settembre 2015

BY THE SIDE OF FR CAFFAREL

9/09/2015

I met Fr Caffarel for the first time on 4 April 1968 at 8 Avenue César-Caire (the Presbytery of St Augustine's Parish) where he had his apartment and his office. After several trials, he engaged me as editor of the *Lettre Mensuelle des Équipes Notre-Dame* (Monthly letter of END) and the *Cahiers sur l'oraison* (Books on prayer). I started working with him in September 1968. He wanted to have me close at hand and had taken a separate office for me near his apartment where, in the library, the collection of *l'Anneau d'Or* (The Golden Ring) (138 editions) had pride of place! Its publication had just been interrupted. I had to come to grips with it as a matter of urgency. In addition, Fr Caffarel asked me to undertake a week of prayer, in the following month, at Troussures, and to take part in the next Teams of Our Lady Session. It was essential for the proper performance of my rôle. So it was that I worked closely with him for five years. In 1973, when he transferred the leadership of the Teams of Our Lady into other hands, I left the Avenue César-Caire for 49 Rue de la Glacière, where, as well as joining the Leading Team with Annick, I took on the editorship of the '*Lettre END*' and the study topics. But Fr Caffarel called on me regularly to help him in his work, particularly after he had finally settled at Troussures in 1979, and I remained close to his preoccupations until the end...

Fr Markowitz has just given you an overview of Fr Caffarel's thinking. Recalling my many conversations with the latter, it seems to me that he would ask me to stress two things to you who now have responsibility for the movement - in order to remain faithful to the original idea, while adapting to current needs. The two points are these:

1. The Teams of Our Lady is a movement of spirituality.
2. The mystery of human love and sexuality.

The Teams of Our Lady, a movement of spirituality.

When Fr Caffarel and I spoke about the Teams of Our Lady, - and we did so every time we met – he made the following point with some force: the Teams of Our Lady was not a family movement, nor a movement of Catholic action, but a movement of spirituality. What does that mean? Simply that its first and essential objective, from which everything else would flow, was to lead its members (as couples united by the sacrament of marriage) to sanctity. Everything was organised towards this end: both the Team meeting ('we join it for God') and the endeavours.

Fr Caffarel himself, after his conversion experience at the age of 20, his ordination as a priest in 1930 and his first jobs (secretariat of the JOC, 1931 to 1934 and directorship of the Christian Office for the Cinema, 1934 to 1936) had asked his bishop to give him leave of absence to devote himself to what he felt to be his true vocation: a spiritual apostolate - to lead human beings to God. And his work had to be a spiritual one, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the course of his theological training, being limited in what he could do intellectually by a kind of cerebral anaemia, he compensated for this handicap by three hours of prayer a day (not thinking about God, but meeting him and allowing God to work on him).



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From the moment he embarked on this particular apostolate (1936) and from then on until the end of his life, he devoted three months of every year to a retreat (February June and October) when he would go off to a secret place, known only to his secretary (who forwarded urgent post). There he would devote himself intensely to prayer and to reflection on his apostolic action, in the presence of God; he planned his books and his great initiatives, the direction of his work and his magazines. Even after he had retired to Troussures, in an atmosphere of tranquillity and reflection, he never gave up his three months of retreat.

This spiritual reflex ("what does the Lord want from me?") was always present with him. Take for example the Belgian affair. The Belgian bishops wanted to claim the right to choose spiritual counsellors for the Teams of Our Lady; this seemed to Fr Caffarel to be incompatible with the essence of a movement which was a lay movement. Naturally Fr Caffarel employed expert canon lawyers to defend his point of view. But at the same time he launched a vast offensive of prayer by creating the "Watchers" - who later became the "Intercessors", a movement which still exists - a chain of volunteers praying throughout the night in relays. Always striving to understand what God wanted and to obtain the light of the Holy Spirit through the mediation of the Church.

At the time of the shock of 1968 which rocked both society and the Church (the student revolt in May, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on responsible parenthood in July) and therefore also church movements like the Teams of Our Lady, Fr Caffarel pondered the solution to the problems which it raised. It was at that time that I came to work for him. I will always remember the day when he burst into my office: "Eureka!, I've found it. I have just re-read the history of the Church. When an upset threatens the barque of St Peter – no matter what the occasion - the real issue is always the most basic one. This is what Teams of Our Lady needs: a re-doubling of spiritual effort. How could I have set up a spiritual movement without including in the "obligations" (the old name for the "endeavours") the reading of the Word of God and prayer? This is nevertheless the indispensable basis. We are going to correct it. So it was that at the pilgrimage in Rome in 1970 the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady was completed in this manner.

And it is at this point that I come back to the idea I began with. The Teams of Our Lady are designed to lead Christian couples to holiness. Being holy is being in harmony with God, compliant to his will, bending to the breath of his Spirit. How can that be accomplished without prayer? It is not enough to write an obligation into the Charter. Once more, couples must be trained in interior and silent prayer, the practice of which is not obvious ("Both a science and an art", said Fr Caffarel, who devoted the whole of his week of prayer at Troussures to it). What can the movement do to achieve this? There are several prayer schools, in the spirit of Fr Caffarel and of his "Five evenings on interior prayer" (I can speak for the one at Nantes which, for the last 15 years, has been welcoming 30 or 40 participants each year). But how few they are in the light of what is needed. I leave you to think about this.

The mystery of human love and sexuality.

Holiness is the goal. But in this case we are talking about the holiness of the couple. The way to it is human love made whole and sanctified by the sacrament. Now sexuality lies at the heart of human love. It is simultaneously the source of its richness and of its fragility. Right up to the end of his life,



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Fr Caffarel did not stop thinking about human love and sexuality. In 1969 he began a big research project into this topic with the couples of the Teams, using a very thorough questionnaire (10 pages: I have one in my archives). He received a large number of very frank and detailed replies (dozens of pages each) which demonstrated how much the couples in question trusted Fr Caffarel. The very quantity of material collected rendered a quick analysis impossible. So it was a lot later, once he had retired to Troussures, that Fr Caffarel had the time to get to grips with it. He was very shaken by what he discovered about the sexual difficulties of couples - Christian couples who were truly trying to live their human love in a Christian context. So he decided to write a book on the subject. This book was to comprise an extensive introduction from him on the Christian vision of human love and the reality of sex (150 pages) plus selected couple experiences, - edited to preserve anonymity but not watered down – some demonstrating complete sexual integration, some partial successes and some complete failures. The book would treat matters of extreme delicacy which Fr Caffarel alone was authorised to publish. We worked on it for years. But Fr Caffarel, very much a perfectionist by temperament, had become almost excessively so as he got older. He was never able to bring himself to complete this work. And before he died he decided to destroy it, along with the testimonies which he had collected and his own explanatory notes...

One day, because I felt niggled by this failure, I suggested that I should interview him on the subject for the magazine "*Alliance*". He consented. We had a long conversation (recorded) and I edited the interview and submitted it to him. Once again, his perfectionism intervened (particularly since the topic was a sensitive one) and he was never able to bring himself to authorise publication. (I have given the recording to the promoter of the cause of his canonisation.) I was reluctant to give up, and I asked Fr Caffarel to let me report some of his ideas, without identifying him as the author, in the "*Lettre des Équipes Notre Dame*". He agreed. So it came about that I published an article entitled "*The dialogue of bodies*" in the "*Lettre*" for January - February 1987, where the wise old man who appears in it is clearly Fr Caffarel, but in order to protect his anonymity, in accordance with his wishes, I portrayed him as using the familiar form of address 'tu' to me, which obviously he never did. I made up my mind that it would be best to quote from this article (which made scarcely any ripples at the time), in order to show you what was at stake. For even though the context has changed utterly ("it is forbidden to forbid"), the challenge remains: how should the Christian couple, sustained by the grace of the sacrament, come to terms with sexuality in such a way that it becomes the servant of love, expressing and deepening it, rather than its capricious mistress, capable of destroying it? Fr Caffarel wanted to institute a "Christian art of loving". He did not succeed. The task remains to be done.

This is the essence of his remarks:

"In the 20th century people love like savages [...]. Our misfortune is the reduction in spirituality. Human love is the first thing to suffer from this aridity. The spirit - and for the Christian the Holy Spirit - is not the enemy of the body, as idiots proclaim at every turn: it is its light. "When your eye is clear, your whole body too is filled with light".(Luke 11, 34.) And when I say spirit, it is in the sense of the soul, or better still, that intimate part of the soul which mystics call "the very essence" or "the innermost depths". [...]



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What I want to stress is that the human being is a unity, and that human love engages all aspects of the being. If one of those aspects does not join in the concert, then love loses its harmony. It becomes discordant. And this discord is a threat. Because no individual instrument can give it's full and true sound except in harmony with the others. And this is especially true of the body. [...]

Let us speak plainly. In human love, there is a danger that the body will make overwhelming demands, to the detriment of the heart and of the soul. I must admit that I am uneasy - leaving aside all moral considerations - when I see young people go straight to cohabitation as soon as they feel a mutual attraction. They submit to the desires of the body. But how do they respond to the simultaneous appeals of the heart and of the soul? If they ignore them, they will learn to their cost that their sexual relationship cannot but suffer. They will be impoverished, and in the long run, disappointed. Hence the stresses and break-ups.

Far be it from me to belittle the body. It has its part to play, and it is a vital part. But it plays this part badly when it claims, if not to be the only one heard, at least to conduct the concert. It is a bad conductor. On the other hand it can be a marvellous player. I often have occasion to tell couples who consult me - generally Christians receptive to the teachings of the Church: you love like savages! Every time you get close to each other, you end up by having sex. And as a result, your relationship suffers at the times when continence becomes necessary, particularly to avoid conception. Or else you have recourse to artificial contraception and become enslaved to it. It is because you have not learnt to play your instrument. You can only make it yield a few notes, and those always the same ones. You remain ignorant of what I call "the dialogue of bodies", which is in reality a dialogue of two people through the medium of their bodies. This must be learnt from your very first meetings. There is so much amorous pleasure in a simple kiss, a caress, or just the fact of being in each other's arms. We need to revive the period of engagement as a time in which young men and young women are introduced to a kind of loving dialogue of bodies as well as of hearts and souls. It is essential for the success of their relationship. Really the education of the human child should take account of the totality of his or her sexual being from infancy. How many parents fail in this regard? But that is another matter.....

Going back to the dialogue of bodies, I think it is something in which married people will find an unexpected blossoming and an answer to many of their sexual difficulties. It is not a question of all or nothing, sexual intercourse or abstinence. They will command a wide range of physical expressions of their love. This dialogue of bodies will be a blessed accompaniment to their emotional and spiritual relationship. It will support love and sympathy. [...]

I am not saying that it is easy. It requires long practice and above all the assistance of love, especially that effervescent love which new beginnings release. But if it is never discussed, how can people learn of the existence of this path, which is the route to happiness? [...]

One more thing. [...] Humanity, and therefore human love, has been seriously wounded since sin came into the world. We must ask Christ for healing, or else echo the bitter experience of St Paul: "What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death?" (Romans 7, 24) Christ not only heals, but he affects a kind of transfiguration of the body. It would be possible to place



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everything I have ever said about the “dialogue of bodies” in a wider context, that of the whole of Christian love flowing from the sacrament of marriage. To put it succinctly, human love, sanctified by the sacrament, becomes the channel by which the grace of Christ is carried to husband and wife, by which it is transformed from within, and brought to fulfilment. Not all at once, but over the course of a journey made under the influence of the sacrament. I often use two Greek words when advising those who come to me, which make a deep impression in their memories: *Eros*, sexual attraction, is infused and irradiated by *agape*, (the love which exists in God and which God transmits to us). It is in this respect that the “dialogue of bodies” takes on its whole meaning within Christian marriage: it is a good conductor of the love of God....”

These were the remarks which Fr Caffarel made in my presence. He did not sign them. So I quote them on my own responsibility. They show the direction in which his investigations tended. And I believe that these investigations are something which it is incumbent on the Teams of Our Lady to pursue. This work - a very important one - is one of the missions of the movement....

I would like to add this: the teachings of St John Paul II on “the theology of the body”, in a similar vein to the works of Fr Caffarel, are most illuminating. We are lucky to have an annotated edition of these teachings, in French, by Yves Semen [John Paul II. *La Théologie du corps*, Cerf, 2014, 786 pages]. And from the same hand, two important works: *La spiritualité conjugale selon Jean-Paul II* (éd. de la Renaissance, 2010, translated into Spanish Italian and Polish) and *La sexualité selon Jean-Paul II* (Éd de la Renaissance, 2004, translated into Spanish Italian Polish and Portuguese). The very enlightening exposition on *eros* and *agape* by Benedict XVI in his first encyclical, *God is love*, should also be noted.

Thank you for your patience and for letting me ramble on. Put it down to my age....

Jean Allemand