

THE CONFERENCE OF FATHER CAFFAREL



**AT THE MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN
REGIONAL RESPONSIBLE COUPLES**

Chantilly, Sunday 3rd May 1987.

Could we begin with a brief recollection, for it is something that is **very** important? It is a question of trying to enter more deeply into the mind of the Lord before we start, so let us spend a few seconds in prayer.

Here is my subject: What is the founding charism of the Teams of Our Lady?

So that you may understand me better, let me begin with a story: I was in Rome, twenty years ago, I was at the Commission of the religious, the body which supervises, controls and guides the congregations and religious orders throughout the whole Church. I was speaking with an ecclesiastic from this Commission and he said to me: “Every year we have some 700, 800 or 1,000 applications for the approval of the foundation of new orders.” I was surprised at these figures, and this cleric, being somewhat misogynous no doubt, said to me: “To tell you the truth, most of these applications come from women: they are not particularly keen on being novices in a long-established order, so they found a new order in order to be straight away “Mother Superior”, and he told me “the applications fall into three categories:

- Those which advance reasons and ideas which are wholly unacceptable, we eliminate them.
- Those which have good ideas, ideas which are very edifying, for the foundation of a new order, so we subject these applications to further study and we will probably grant them.
- And a third category, that as regards which we have the feeling that probably there is a founding charism at the start but, to tell the truth, there never is one at the start, it is the future that decides.

What is meant by “founding charism.”? Well, something totally different from just a good idea, rather an inspiration of the Holy Spirit which will be like a dynamic force which will guide the institution throughout the whole of its development and will allow it fulfil its mission. There are groups which have at the start a founding charism but it can happen that, over the years, there is a falling away: and the history of the Church gives many examples of this because their successors were not sufficiently welded to the founding charism by thought and prayer, and all of a sudden, decline sets in. This man from the Commission for the religious continues to address me: “This is clearly why, he says, the Council was very insistent in asking the Congregations, and the religious orders, to bring about an *aggiornamento*. That is to say, to envisage a renewal, a renaissance, starting with reflecting on, and enquiring into the needs of their members and with a view to responding to the demands of the times and having regard to the future.

So, there are three elements when one is envisaging an *aggiornamento*, as you are doing now, after 40 years. To return to the source, because sometimes the spring has become clogged with sand, the spring which I call the founding charism. There are religious orders which, in the course of time, take a wrong turn. I am thinking of such a one I know very well. It is an order of women. At the outset it was founded to educate poor children and it finished up having only boarding schools for the daughters of a

social elite: girls from this background produce more vocations than poor children: there you have an example of infidelity to the founding charism. So, return to the source.

Secondly, keep in mind the needs and values of the period in which one is living. Each period brings new values to the Church and to society, some positive and some negative; there is no doubt that we must keep in mind the values which are positive and the needs of individuals. One has to verify to what extent these values, which one is envisaging adopting, are consistent with the founding charism. Some years ago it happened that certain Trappists asked permission of their superior to become worker-priests. He consulted with other superiors and then told them that it was not within the order's founding charism, which did not mean that he looked down on worker-priests but simply that the Trappists had a different vocation.

Return to the source, take on board the current needs and values to the extent that they can be assimilated and then consider the road ahead. What is the direction in which the Movement must be invited to go forward, but always linked to the founding charism? This notion of fidelity to the founding charism is vital, but one must not confuse being faithful with being set in one's ways. I dare to believe to-day, after 40 years, that at the origin of the Teams of Our Lady there was a founding charism. But mind you, I do not take myself for someone inspired, a prophet or a saint.

At the start we had no inkling of what the future might be; we did not say: "the Holy Spirit prompted me to do such and such." It is to-day, after 40 years, looking at the development of the Teams, that these are my thoughts: in 1939, with the first four couples, there was something other than just a good idea, there was something other than just enthusiasm, that this coming together was not just by chance, that Providence and the Holy Spirit had a part to play in it, and now I give thanks to the Lord, but at the same time I put a question to myself. And it is of this I want to speak to you.

What is it of the founding charism that has really been understood over the years? What has been imperfectly understood? And what is it we could not understand but which we understand better at the present time?

When one envisages an *aggiornamento*, as you are doing, there is a major law which must be respected, and not only at these decisive moments but throughout the whole of the process. First of all, those in control, and that is your position, must be in close contact with those at the base. This is why, when a religious order carries out an *aggiornamento*, all the members of the order are consulted: be in close contact with those at the base, it is often there that the founding charism is preserved in its purest form.

The second law: it is also necessary to be in contact with those at the base in order to pass on what has been understood, what those at the top understand; it is always a very serious matter when there is a gap between the top and the members. It is a very difficult problem, and I became aware that it existed in the Teams of Our Lady. There was a time when I was in contact with all the responsible couples every two weeks or every month, it was obviously a very direct contact; then, little by little, a whole hierarchy was put in

place, and to establish contact became much more difficult. But, no matter what the price, there must be the will to establish it. But first of all, the first point which I mentioned above.

What is it of the founding charism that appears to have been well perceived, well understood, and well assimilated?

I am unable to put into words the first steps. It was the sowing of a seed in which there was all the dynamism which powered the take-off of the Movement. One day, in March 1939, a young married woman came to see me to ask me if I would help her to progress in her spiritual life. Naturally, I agreed. Two weeks later, she asked me if I would see her husband; I agreed. And a month later, both of them asked me if I would agree to have a meeting with three other couples, friends of theirs, who were concerned with how to make progress in living as Christians. They were four young couples under thirty years of age. I hesitated because I had had a cruel experience. In an abbey, I was with a group of adolescent scouts; there had been a discussion, and they had put the following question to me: "Father, could you speak to us of love? So, trusting in my knowledge of Scholastic psychology, I said to them: "To love, is to wish somebody well." They burst out laughing: "To wish somebody well! But, you know nothing about it." And I beat a hasty retreat saying: "Well, my answer needs to be qualified somewhat." But it did not stop my being mortified by this little experience. So, when I found myself faced with this proposal from the couples, I was lacking in confidence, all the same, I went to the meeting. The couples were very characteristic of young couples of that era: they had effected a twofold reconciliation. Firstly, a reconciliation between love and marriage: a well-known saying was often heard at that time and in the preceding years: "Love is one thing, marriage is another." I think it was either Maurois or Mauriac who was the author of it. Well, for these young couples, almost all of them having been scouts, this reconciliation had been effected: love and marriage, both were one and the same thing. They had had no love affairs beforehand, their first love was their spouse. And their marriage was a love full of joy. They had effected a second reconciliation: Religion and the love of Christ are one and the same thing. I do not know if you can recall what the thinking was in regard to this at that time, and for many years before, when I was in College; no one spoke of God's love; in France we were still very influenced by Jansenism and a priest who spoke of God's love was an oddity. I had the good fortune to meet a spiritual director who actually spoke to me of Christ's love. But, it was truly a reconciliation that had to be effected by Catholics, and these four couples had succeeded in doing it.

The result was that I had before me couples in whom dwelt two loves: love of their spouse and love of Christ. At first sight, one might think that conjugal love and the love of Christ are each all consuming and intransigent, but they had the curious experience of discovering that these two loves, which are absolute, fitted perfectly together in their spiritual life without their really being able to understand the uniting of the love of spouse and the love of Christ; this is why they were eager to discover how to progress towards holiness with those two loves in their heart. The first meeting, very joyful, full of optimism, flowing from the great joy, which was theirs, of loving each

other and loving Christ. They put thirty six questions to me and suddenly my apprehensions disappeared, I was even surprised to feel so much at ease, and then I understood why I was so much at ease; for the previous 10 or 15 years I had had a relationship of love with Christ, and in the company of these couples, who spoke to me of their love, I discovered that in the life of the couple were to be found the laws which I had discovered in my relationship with Christ; the laws of love are the same everywhere. And this is what immediately won me over and made me enthusiastic, we were going to be able to help each other, they would bring to me the concrete life which they were leading, and I would bring to them such notions as I had about spirituality. How many times have I said to myself that I would by no means have developed in the way I did if, instead of meeting these four couples, I had at the commencement of my ministry discovered marriage in the confessional; I would have got to know the moral difficulties and the psychological difficulties, I would have formed a much more sombre idea of the union of man and woman; fortunately it was with these four couples that I became interested in marriage.

The other idea was, from the very beginning, to discover God's thinking on the couple, and on everything concerning the couple. And I think there we hit on one of the fundamental elements of the founding charism, so much so that we made a list of all the elements which go to make up the life of the couple and the life of the family and we said that we would seek to discover God's will on each of these elements in turn. We had no idea that four months later war would be declared, the four couples would be dispersed and I myself would go off to the army.

The second orientation: all of them, without exception, had no difficulty with the thought that their vocation was – holiness: holiness seemed to them to be the flowering of love, the completion of their conjugal love and of their love of Christ. And then, this thought immediately led them to discover in a wholly new way the sacrament of marriage, not just a formality but a source of prodigious grace, Christ coming to save love, ailing since original sin, and bringing to it much needed help and huge graces.

Something else became apparent to us, very important, it had its origin at a meeting when we were praying, for at each of the meetings we prayed, spontaneously, it was a need, above all a need to praise God for what these couples were living and for what they were discovering about God's thinking. They were full of wonder to discover that God had such a marvellous idea about human love. And then, one day, during the prayer, one of the women addressed God in these terms: "Lord, we thank you for the marriage of our two sacraments: the priesthood and marriage." I think this insight was very far-seeing, and I think it is part of the dynamism of the start-up, the alliance of the priesthood, which represents the Church, and the thinking of the Church, and the couples who bring their richness, their needs, their questions and the necessity of a dialogue so that the teaching of the Church should not be disconnected from the concrete realities of their life, but rather that it should try to respond not only to the needs of the couples but also to their aspirations. And throughout the whole life of the Teams we have held firmly to this notion of the marriage of the two sacraments. We had four meetings – that was all, but it was sufficient, I can say, to decide for me what was my vocation. Thanks to these

meetings I developed tremendous enthusiasm and then, in July 1940, I came back after three times escaping from the Germans, I was appointed curate to a parish, and straight away I met other couples and spoke to them about the experience we had had. And they asked me to let them have this same experience of meetings of couples.

It was in a completely different climate, there was the war, there were restrictions, there was suffering, there were threats, sometimes there was a visit of the Gestapo to the home of one or other of the couples, taking one of the husbands off to a camp to be deported. We kept the pre-war enthusiasm because God's thinking on marriage was the foundation of this enthusiasm, but at the same time we had become conscious that human life is not an easy road. So, with much good will and tenacity we set out to explore together the doctrine of the sacrament of marriage. The thinking of the Church on all the aspects of marriage; we asked ourselves how we should live in a Christian way the realities of conjugal and family life. And then we widened our question: how to fulfil in the married state all the demands of the Christian life? I think that is more precise. And in particular it appeared to us to be necessary to tease out the spirituality of a married Christian for, it was clear, the teaching of the Church, of priests, at that time to men and women wishing to sanctify themselves, was a spirituality developed by monks or other religious. So there was a discovery to be made, otherwise we were bound to remain in a cul-de-sac, the couples would never get very far on the road to holiness if they were tied to the spirituality of a monk. So, the first deepening, during the years of the occupation: a doctrinal deepening, with the feeling that we would never finish getting to the bottom of God's thinking on marriage.

Second deepening: the deepening of friendship, in those circumstances, so difficult, sometimes dramatic, as I referred to earlier, we began to understand that these meetings of couples did not simply have as their aim the deepening of a doctrine but had also the aim of enabling friendships to be formed, and suddenly these groups of couples understood that one aspect of their vocation was mutual help. Mutual help and prayer. The first time that one of these husbands was taken away by the Gestapo, I remember that, the same afternoon, we immediately telephoned to all the other couples, and we decided to go to the home of that couple to spend the night in prayer. The women had divans and beds, and we, the men, were in the sitting-room, lying under blankets, and we prayed in turn all night in the home of that couple and, by the way, the husband did return ultimately. But we felt this need for prayer extremely strongly, and since then I could not conceive of any meeting of couples taking place without prayer being part of it. That then was from 1940 to 1945. The prisoners, the deportees, returned, some did not return, alas! The groups multiplied, it became a fashion, some came out of a concern to deepen their knowledge of God, and some in order to find human friendship and perhaps also out of snobbery.

I had a strong feeling that there was a threat hanging over these groups, a threat of weakening. Instead of having a high ideal, being content to take the easy way. It was a critical turning point. It was then that I was driven to reflect, to put this question to myself: how is it that members of religious orders journey towards sanctity throughout their whole life without falling away, without becoming discouraged, without

abandoning? It is because they have a rule. And this idea came into my mind; it stuck there and I spoke to others about it: "If we wish to avoid a collapse, or at least choosing the easy way, do we not need to have a rule?" And it is in 1945, 1946 and 1947 that we thought about the Charter, but we were straight away conscious of the fact that if we envisaged taking this course we ran the risk of losing a great many couples, which is what happened. On the 8th December 1947, in the crypt of the Church of St. Augustine in Paris, all the couples had been invited to attend; a rumour had gone round that something more demanding was going to be proposed and, as anticipated, a third of the couples left, they did not accept a rule that was demanding. We felt very badly about this, we asked ourselves if we had been too ambitious, but finally, in the years that followed, we discovered that the groups of couples who stayed were in fact those who accepted what made demands on them.

And then there was an explosion, an unexpected expansion to the four corners of the globe. And then there were our great Gatherings, particularly in Lourdes and Rome. And I remember that in 1959 the following question arose for consideration. "The Teams of Our Lady, are they a movement of initiation to the spirituality of the couple and the family? But, if a movement of initiation, one leaves it when one has been initiated, a child does not spend the rest of its life in the nursery." And, in effect, we were conscious of the danger of the Teams of Our Lady being a crèche for adults. Or, on the other hand, our movement, is it a movement seeking perfection, and the response which came out of the Gathering in Rome was that the Teams should be both a movement of initiation and a movement seeking perfection. It is simpler; a movement of initiation, and a movement seeking perfection, this means finding rules which permit the members to advance along the road. That's how it is. So let us make a resume of the elements of the founding charism as they emerged in the course of these years. To my mind there are seven:

- Firstly, marriage is a work of God, and it is God's masterpiece.
- Secondly, marriage has a soul and it is love, and to neglect love is to condemn marriage,
- Thirdly, men and women cannot be faithful to love without help from Christ, this is why he invented the sacrament of marriage; we must delve deeply into it.
- Fourthly, married Christians, like other people, like monks, are called to be holy, which was quite an original idea. The Vatican Council had not yet taken place, and it was at the Council that great insistence was put on the vocation to holiness of the laity.
- Fifthly, conjugal life has very great riches but can also be very demanding.
- Sixthly, it is necessary, in fact indispensable, to develop a spirituality of the couple, which cannot be the spirituality of a celibate or of a monk.
- Seventhly, this spirituality can only be lived with the help of a movement to give direction to the couples' thinking and a framework for their lives.

This is what has been fully perceived regarding the founding charism; I will tell you now what has been less well perceived:

- Firstly, having been made very enthusiastic by these young couples so filled with love, I thought love would be the great factor in their achieving perfection, and that I should say to them "Be faithful to love." I forgot that Christ proposes two

means to those who wish to seek perfection: love and self-sacrifice. God wishes the Christian to be perfect, the couple to be perfect, he wishes every human being to become perfect, they will only become so by being faithful to love and self-sacrifice, that is to say, by giving themselves and forgetting themselves. Love and self-sacrifice are the two sides of the coin, no love without self-sacrifice, and a self-sacrifice which is not a self-sacrifice made out of love is a self-sacrifice which is impossible in practice. And in reflecting on this I understood that the Lord had invented marriage as the great means of developing love and as the great means of making self-sacrifice possible. And I understood that self-sacrifice cannot be merely a side line, that true self-sacrifice takes over, it never ceases to love, to love permanently with the attitude “for you” and never with the attitude “for me”. To walk on the roads of the earth, the Lord gave us two legs, to walk on the roads to holiness, the Lord gave us two means, love and self-sacrifice. For I realised that I had invited couples to hop on one foot to reach their destination, and one does not get very far along the road hopping on one foot, one must advance on two feet, putting one foot after the other. And I am not so sure that this penetrated fully into the consciousness of the Teams of Our Lady. Marriage, a great means of love, and a great means of self-sacrifice precisely in order to make it possible for there to be love.

One of my souvenirs: after a conference on conjugal spirituality, a woman came to see me, a woman who must have been about 60, she said to me: “Father, how I want to thank you, but to think we did not know all that, my husband and I, at the time of our marriage.” I stop to listen. “I am going to tell you something.” I expect her to confide something to me, I let her talk. “”Ah, I can tell you everything. Well, the colonel (when she spoke of her husband, it was always the colonel, as if there was only one colonel in the world) the colonel, when I married him, was already very advanced in the spiritual life. Ah, I can tell you the rest, he was a member of the Franciscan third order (she had difficulty in getting out her story) he wore a hair-shirt, but I have to add that it was me that it scratched.” I felt like saying to her: “But, (I withheld the malicious remark) he ought to have understood that it was enough to have a wife, there was no need to have a hair-shirt as well.”

The moral of the story: the true way of dying to oneself, for there is forever this old egotism at work in us, the true way is to love, and to love from morning to night, and never to let oneself revert back to the “for me” mentality but always to remain with the attitude of the one who is poor. The Lord invented marriage as the best way of making progress in love and self-sacrifice. Members of religious orders have something else, married couples have this.

The second point which has not been seen in a way that is sufficiently clear. Sexuality in marriage: it was not something unknown, and these young couples were even quite ready to talk about it very freely. None the less, we have not gone deeply into the question, we have not delved into the meaning of sexuality from the human point of view and the Christian point of view, we have not sufficiently helped team members to achieve human perfection in sexuality or Christian perfection. I felt this so strongly that

when we were thinking of the pilgrimage to Rome in 1970, and the Pope asked us on what topic we would like him to speak to us, I proposed that he give us a conference on the human and Christian meaning of sexuality, and we prepared a memorandum of 30 pages on the subject. This was submitted to Paul VI who had this response sent to me: "It is not ripe for treatment, I cannot accede to your request." And in one way we were not sorry; he in fact delivered the admirable address with which you are all familiar. But in order to make it easier for Paul VI, we had launched a far-reaching inquiry, containing between one hundred and one hundred and fifty questions, on the sexual life of each of the team members: I gave an absolute commitment that the anonymity of the replies would be fully respected and asked them to reply with complete frankness. We received more than a thousand replies to the inquiry. But since the Pope had not taken up the topic, the inquiry remained dormant for years and it was only last year that I said to myself: "It is out of the question to leave it in oblivion," and I began to go through the replies. I have now read something like 800 replies, some of them running to between 20 – 50 pages. It was no light work but for me it has been truly an eye-opener. I am far from being an altar boy, I had received confidences from lots of couples, but I had had only a very general view of the sexual life of this category of team couples. It taught me a great deal. I am still very affected by it, and I hope I will be able to set out my conclusions in a book, if God gives me the time.

Firstly, what affected me very strongly was the silence of parents on this topic, a negligence displayed by 95%. You will say to me, those who replied, this was in 1969, it was not the couples of 1987, I am not sure that there has been any great progress in this domain. So, the silence of parents, what this means: a difficulty for most children, boys and girls, which means difficulties of which they don't dare to speak, which means culpabilisation, and often neurotic culpabilisation. I am affected by these troubles of childhood, these consciences troubled for years, which means: engaged couples having difficulties because the parents say nothing and the priests don't say much more. Very often, for very many, the period of engagement is difficult, the fiancés not knowing exactly, as they say: "what is permitted, and what is forbidden." The commencement of the marriage, catastrophic, I did not believe that it could be so to such an extent. No one talks about it, needless to say. Sexual harmony rarely achieved at the start, often it takes two or three years, sometimes ten or fifteen, and in many couples it is never achieved, and that inquiry helped me to appreciate to what degree it is of capital importance.

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. And it is there that I recognised that the people of

the Church, from this point of view, have not been faithful to their mission. They preach the morality of marriage, they say what is permitted and what is prohibited, but not a single book on this topic is offered to married Christians; such does not exist, or tell me if you are aware of one.

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. Also, I had probably minimised the importance of the teaching of the Church on original sin.

The third aspect of the founding charism which it seems to me, has not been sufficiently understood, but to tell the truth, it is only over the course of the years that it could be understood: the mission of the Teams of Our Lady. For the Teams of Our Lady have a vocation, to help couples to become holy. The Teams of Our Lady have a mission in the Church, we must continually bear in mind these two aspects, vocation and mission. So, after 40 years, we understand it better, I venture to say something to you which may appear to you to be an invitation to be proud, but it is not. The founding and the development of the Teams of Our Lady in the Church is a great Church event. Before 1939 there was not in the Church any group of couples; there were innumerable groups of individuals, but of groups of couples, there were none. It was something altogether unusual, there could not have been any such groups precisely because couples had not had the experiences of which we have been speaking. An example: in the first group I was with, we decided to make a retreat, and I went to ring at the door of a Jesuit retreat house: "Could we have a retreat in your house?" But, of course, (then he checked) but are there women?" "But yes, retro satanas!" They had never accepted women in their Jesuit retreat house. I go to the Sisters of the Cenacle: "But, are there men? Impossible!" This little anecdote displays the novelty of a movement of couples. It is there we discover an aspect of the founding charism which I had failed badly to understand.

Finally, in the Church, one only saw the individual, one reacted as if the whole point of creation, of God's great enterprise in creating the universe, the point, the supreme point, the perfection of God's work, was the individual: one forgot completely these lines in Genesis " God created man in his image, in the image of God He created him, man and woman He created them, and they shall be one flesh." The summit of the pyramid, it is not the individual, it is the couple. This is something very new, and the Movement should oblige the Church to revise somewhat its anthropology and its conception of things. St. John Chrysostom, one of the Fathers of the Church, though not a spiritual counsellor in the Teams of Our Lady, wrote this, this very strong statement: He who is not married, is not a unit, he is only half a unit." But this goes very far. Men and women possess the same human nature, so they are equal. They possess the same human nature but according to different modalities. So they complement each other when they

unite, they form the entity which is the couple. The couple, it is the work of God. I had this intuition with those first four couples, but I had not analysed the issue, I was insisting rather on love, on marriage, but I think that in the Church we must not be contented with speaking only of marriage and love, we must speak of the couple and it is all the more necessary to-day, rather than formerly, since we have arrived at the point where the difference of the sexes is being denied. That Madame Badinter, the wife of the Minister for Justice, should have written a book entitled: "One is the Other." IS, that is to say, man and woman are interchangeable, is one of the great catastrophes of our world of the expiring 20th century. Finally, since sexuality has been trivialised, then the complementarity of the sexes is unknown and one reaches this collapse of society: in 15 years the number of marriages in France has gone from 450,000 to 225,000 or something like that. Let us be careful then of the way we speak about the Teams of Our Lady; formerly we spoke of a movement of "ménages": oh, la, la! The work "Menage," I can no longer stand it, we spoke of a movement of "foyers", that's a bit vague, it is a movement of couples. And that is the great affirmation that we must bring to the Church. I have not the time to tell you of the play by Giroudoux entitled "Sodom and Gomorrha."

Second aspect of the Teams of Our Lady: Before the arrival of the Teams of Our Lady, before this event which I have told you was revolutionary, the teaching was that "if you want to be perfect, give up thoughts of marriage and choose the religious life." That was what a priest said to me when I made my retreat at the end of my last year in College, and I replied to him, I was very naïve: "But really, if we were to listen to you, the end result would be that humanity would no longer exist, everyone would choose the religious life or to be a priest." Being a naïve 15 year old I thought that everybody wanted to be perfect. And the Teams of Our Lady, what do they say? That it is possible to become holy in and through the state of marriage. I am not going to stress it. You are all very familiar with the concept. But it is a new concept which is not a current concept in the Church.

Third "revolution", if I may call it such: before the Teams of Our Lady – and it is still like this in the Church – we were somewhat Manicheean, matter and the flesh, it was what we had to free ourselves from as much as possible, we were not far from thinking like Plato: "the body is the tomb of the soul." 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 came 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.

Fourth "revolution": When I was a child we used to sing: "I have only one soul which I must save." And holiness, it was an individual matter, I did not sanctify myself for you. It is you who will save yourself. And the Teams of Our Lady, in the Church, say: but mutual help is something willed by God as a path to holiness, you do not save

yourself on your own. Mutual help within the couple and the mutual help between couples, this is something new.

Fifth “revolution”. Bear in mind that I am giving the word “revolution” a broad meaning, I am not claiming that nothing of all this had been perceived before, but it is at the same time very characteristic of the Movement. Formerly, holiness was conceived as being “Cultivate your spiritual beauty.” But when one speaks of the holiness of people who are married, one recalls this saying of Christ’s: “The tree will be judged by its fruit,” not by its beauty but by its fruit. When God presents to us Abraham whom he wishes to make the father of all the saints, he points out to him the stars in the sky saying: “This is your posterity.” “Your holiness, it shall be your fruitfulness.” This is rather new in the Church, it is not about cultivating one’s beauty but about participating in creation which is directed towards an end. It is an idea which is very much part of contemporary thinking, this idea of the evolution of the world and the necessity of contributing to that evolution. But marriage makes us understand this very well, it is about transmitting life, it is not simply about putting a shine on your personal perfection.

I regret one thing, this is just between us, I am not blaming anyone, by no means, I regret that the Teams of Our Lady, seen from the perspective of their mission, did not continue the centres of preparation for marriage. They were created by the Teams of Our Lady but very soon they lost their Christian ethos. I do not think that the Teams of Our Lady should have taken on the management of the preparation for marriage but I think that the Teams of Our Lady should have centres for the preparation of marriage to which the other centres could have referred to profit from the spirituality which they had discovered. And I regret, my second regret, that the marriage counsellors, many of whom are members of the Teams, have not been formed and supported by the Teams: as a result they rely more on the psychology of Freud than on the spirituality of marriage and the family. And there too my wish would be that the Teams of Our Lady should have marriage counsellors and not maintain they have a monopoly but act in such a way that there should be references to them on the lines of the founding charism.

What could not have been seen, I have told you what had been very well seen, what had been less well seen, and what could not have been seen and could only be seen in the current circumstances. Firstly, today we must start at the bottom; there are quantities of couples who have never been properly taught the Catechism and who have little knowledge of the Christian life and who fulfil very badly the demands of that life. At the present time, I know teams in which it requires an effort to get the couples to go to Mass on Sunday. The question would not have arisen forty years ago, it is a fact, a matter of the practice of one’s religion, but it is above all a question of religious formation. The lack of knowledge of the catechism explains how there are couples with a very inadequate Christian formation who wish, none the less, to join the Teams of Our Lady. This reminds me of what I came across in Brazil some time ago. They had inaugurated in Brazil years of study, of preparation for joining the Teams of Our Lady. There is something that needs to be done, we have no right to let down couples who are far removed in their thinking or in their practice but who, none the less, wish to join the Teams of Our Lady.

Secondly, what could not have been seen previously but which is better understood now: there are couples who have been 10, 20 or 30 years in the Teams of Our Lady and are feeling the need to go further. I know these teams, I know these couples, some have come to me for confession for more than 40 years, and it is wonderful to see how they are evolving, and just as we may have to start at a lower level, perhaps we should be giving more help to those who wish to go further. It is not an easy question, it is the problem that a teacher has, should the focus be on the average pupils in the class or are the best going to be pushed none the less with a view to helping them progress towards becoming more advanced. I do not know what is to be done; I am not putting forward any answer, but it makes me sad to see these couples who, after a certain number of years, are disappointed by their teams. It is true that in the same team there are some who have not made any progress, and others who have progressed and who have major spiritual needs, what can be done? What is the answer? I don't know, but we cannot let down those who wish to go further. I raise the question, I have no fixed idea about it. At the present time, certain of these couples, who are aspiring to a holier life, are tempted by communities where they will be with celibates, nuns and priests. It is fifty years since I saw couples tempted to found communities of couples, but none of those which I knew over those fifty years has lasted. I asked myself why, if there was not something there which had some significance; even still, at the present day, certain people are putting this question to themselves. I have no definite answer, but one thing I note, it is that the couple has this very solid, very coherent reality of which I spoke a short while ago. And that a community of couples is more or less at risk of merging somewhat into a wider community, particularly if it is demanding, and particularly in a community where the members lead a common life. It is an experience I have had. In a certain way the couple has too much support, but to tell the truth, they have not in fact much support: the husband and the wife are somewhat relieved of responsibility. I ask myself if we are not here in touch with an important law; the couple is a society, a community which above all must be protected, which is autonomous; whereas as regards movements of couples, provided they are really true to their vocation, with the couples living fully in the world, open to every wind, the couples find in the Movement something which strengthens them. In the Teams of Our Lady the couples do not disintegrate, they do not cease to be responsible. So, what is to be done, what answer can be given to those who put this question? This brings me back to what I was saying a short while ago, perhaps what it means is what can be done for those who have more demanding spiritual concerns, so that they may be helped in the Teams of Our Lady and not have to look for another way.

The fourth thing that could not have been foreseen 50 years ago: the huge multiplication of the methods and means of contraception. It has resulted in a fearful change in the Teams of Our Lady, for if, formerly, most of the couples took very great care to respect God's law, at the present time innumerable couples in the Teams of Our Lady use contraception, and I am very preoccupied by this. I am not going to develop the question, it would take too long. They use contraception because, as I said a short time ago, the couples have not been taught to comprehend the quality of sexual intercourse and so its morality is unacceptable to them. When an individual offends against the law of God, it is said that he loses the state of grace. When in a movement there is a big

proportion of the members, I have no idea what the proportion is, is it 20%, 40%, 70%, I just don't know; where in a movement there is a serious proportion of the members which ignores, which does not want to hear about God's law, that movement is at risk of losing its state of grace, and it risks sliding into decadence and becoming perverted.

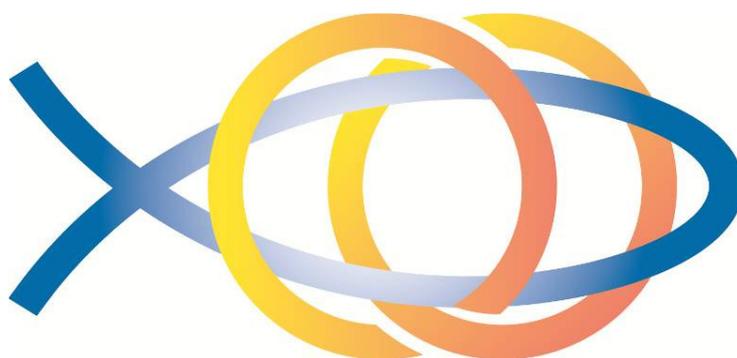
Fifth and final point: what was not sufficiently appreciated at the start, which could not have been, and which now is. For goodness sake, help the couples of the Teams to grow old very well, to have a good death, to live their widowhood very well. I know many of the friends of the early years and who are still in the Teams, we should be very concerned about helping these elderly people to progress in holiness. Old age is a big trump card for making progress in God's love. I have not sufficiently followed your publications. Help the couples of the Teams to have a good death, and help your founder to have a good death! But before old age and death there is retirement. I ask myself if, in the Teams of Our Lady, enough is being done to make people discover the Christian meaning of retirement, of this time of life which is very important. I bring this to your notice without spending time on it.

And then there is the drama of unemployment: in the Teams of Our Lady do we enable people to discover the Christian way of being unemployed? This is something which could not be seen 40 years ago, something with which people are confronted now. To finish, I would like to read to you , I am running late, but it will not take long, a lovely passage which alludes to what I have just been saying to you: I published it in "L'Anneau d'Or" at some time in the past. An old man decided to write the story of his marriage for the numerous members of his family: before finishing the first chapter, which was devoted to the period of his engagement, he wrote the following post-script to the chapter: "I should finish this chapter here, but I want to add another few pages, they would be superfluous if I was assured of being able to finish the story of my life, but without displaying extreme rashness how could I count on being left sufficient time to get to the end of the task I have undertaken? I am 77 years old. Since I am still capable of doing it, and to-morrow perhaps I will no longer be able to, I want in the last pages of this first chapter to render to my beloved Suzanne the tribute that I owe her. Younger than I by eight years, she will survive me. May she feel some sweetness in reading here, when I will no longer be alive, what my thoughts of her are now in the presence of death. She created the happiness of my life; after 45 years together I love her more than I loved her when for the first time she opened her arms to me; my tender feelings have become less burning and more deep, we still have not said everything to each other: calm kisses, gentle embraces, reawaken distant springtimes, but above all our souls are bonded together in the same faith, the same hope. When the year brings around again the 6th July it is as pleasing for me to say again the fateful "Yes" from the bottom of my heart as it is for a member of a religious order, who is happy in his vocation, to renew his vows. It would not have been like this if my Suzanne had not, with a courage which at times amounted to heroism, fulfilled all her duties as wife and mother.

My intellectual tastes, my inability to make money, my contempt for worldliness, my passion for books, and no doubt, without knowing it, other aspects of my character, were made to irritate her and to hurt her. Because it is one of my principles to speak only

the absolute truth, I do not want to say that she never suffered from this, that she never complained to me about it, that my consciousness of the sorrow I caused her in spite of myself, never caused me any pain. But she maintained for me, like the blue sky above the clouds, an unchanging determination to make my life pleasant and to make me feel sensitive to the tenderness of her heart. She gave me six children. Whenever we were separated, she wrote to me everyday. In spite of all the attacks on me from outside and my personal failings, she at all times gave me her comforting esteem, she always had a smile in reserve for me, and she did all this in a life in which the days of sickness, physical exhaustion, mourning and mental suffering were almost as numerous as those of good health and unruffled calm. I shall leave this world certain that for as long as she shall survive me she shall never cease praying that heaven may strengthen my soul. May God bless her and reward her and may her descendants venerate her memory.”

Impossible not to wish that this may be true for all and in particular for all those couples that we help. I am not going to reach any conclusion; to reach conclusions is your business, not mine. My role was simply to set out the facts and to invite you to be faithful to the founding charism, and to invite you to be creative within that faithfulness. But I would like to point out, before I finish, a coincidence: it happens that you are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Charter in the year that the Pope has decreed should be a Marian year. You know that the Marian year begins at Pentecost and will end at the Feast of the Assumption in 1988. Well, I see there a providential sign, for our faith in Mary, in her love, in her intercession, was there from the beginning of the Teams of Our Lady, and that is why, precisely, the Teams of Our Lady, have Our Lady in their title. It is not by chance, and so I invite you, more than ever, to renew that confidence in the Virgin Mary who will preside over the destiny of the Teams.



Teams of Our Lady

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