



## THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL RAISON D'ÊTRE OF TEAMS OF OUR LADY

Dear family of the International College of END. This email from the ERI comes to you a few months after having experienced those wonderful days in Assisi, in the framework of our annual college which, by the grace of God, we were able to experience in person, taking the necessary precautions that post-pandemic conditions demanded of us.

As usual at the ERI meeting that precedes the college, we devoted an afternoon to a meeting with SR Italy, our host on this occasion, with the Super Regional team and with several Italian team couples who were kind enough and enthusiastic enough to travel from different places, some not so close, to this beautiful city of Assisi. Here the spirituality of St. Francis is breathed, and it gave a special character to our meetings.

At this meeting, we had an opportunity for an exchange of questions and ideas between the ERI and the participants. In relation to several questions that arose about the Teams in the face of various realities of non-sacramental unions that are not the subject of this email, it allowed us to talk about a subject that we consider fundamental to understand as team members and being co-responsible for preserving fidelity to the principles that inspire us.

We said in our response that the TEAMS OF OUR LADY movement must be understood from two dimensions: ITS CHARISMATIC DIMENSION AND ITS ECCLESIAL DIMENSION. These are the *raison d'être* of its existence and are intimately linked, allowing us to approach in an integral way, its knowledge and the living of the life plan it proposes to us.

In previous ERI emails, with the format we have adopted since the pandemic, Father Ricardo and other ERI companions have already referred to the CHARISMATIC DIMENSION of our movement, so in this issue, we want to refer with greater emphasis to the ECCLESIAL DIMENSION and the *raison d'être* of END. From this perspective, we will take a look at the role we play as a community or organic entity within the church and what this means for our mission.

We have always said that we are struck every day by the prophetic and timeless character of Father Caffarel's messages. We have the good fortune and the discipline of assiduously consulting his writings in the monthly letter of the movement, the articles he wrote in the "Golden Ring", and the different editorials in which he addressed the Teams of Our Lady. Through these writings we seek his enlightenment to express ourselves, being faithful to his thinking which is the spiritual heritage that has marked a firm path in these 75 years.

In order to contextualise this letter, we want to go back to the first years of the movement to listen to what he had to say about the subject we are dealing with.

We refer to the text below which serves to guide our reflection. It is taken from the fourth editorial of the monthly letter of the Teams of Our Lady in 1954. It was written by our founder about the pilgrimage that the movement was undertaking to the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, in what he

called a gesture of thanksgiving to God, the "author of every gift", and also a gesture of thanksgiving to the Church and to Our Lady for having allowed this gift to find open hearts in our midst.

“Too much influenced by an individualistic education, we sometimes find it difficult to convince ourselves that God's gifts only come to us in the Church and through the Church, as St Cyprian said: ‘No one has God for a father who does not want the Church for a mother’. It is important to understand that we have not gone to foreign lands to find these riches of marriage but have found them in the inexhaustible treasure of our mother, the Church. We have received them from her hands. We have no right to keep them as greedy profiteers. Since we have received them from the Church, the Church must be the first beneficiary. Our gratitude must not be just a word from our lips, but a gift of self.

A gift of self, an ardent and deliberate willingness to put the couple at the service of the Church so that our children may be her children:

- to offer with eagerness to those whom God would call to ‘the highest service’
- to work with all our strength to pass on what we have understood about marriage to so many couples who do not know it and are waiting for it
- to collaborate in its missionary task, beginning with our parishes".

Teams of Our Lady began to take shape in 1939 and, despite the vicissitudes of the war, did not falter but, on the contrary, showed a leavening effect in the dough which multiplied in the post-war period. However, it was not until 1947 that Father Caffarel established the ‘rule’ which took the form of THE FOUNDING CHARTER, after being sure that this strength did not come from an ephemeral impulse but had the force of a charism which was the trigger for this surprising growth.

The Charism of MARRIED SPIRITUALITY, then, was revealed as the source that radiated life to our journey and, like all charisms, it was not a gift exclusive to the emerging movement but a gift for the church.

In the article we quoted, it is absolutely certain that, from the genesis of END, Father Caffarel was clear that our movement and each of its members could not escape from the ecclesial dimension of this gift. This ecclesial character should be an imprint on our journey. In it, he emphasised and warned of the danger of not understanding that this path could not be seen as a personal discovery and even less as a gift for the enjoyment of ‘our individualistic self’.

Many years later, on 9 March 2006, at the opening of the first congress of ecclesial movements and new communities in Latin America, Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko, former president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, said the following:

“Among the many fruits produced for Church life by the Second Vatican Council, the ‘new associative moment’ of the lay faithful, undoubtedly holds a special place. Thanks to the ecclesiology and the theology of the laity developed by the Council, many groups referred to today as ‘ecclesial movements’ or ‘new communities’ have appeared alongside the traditional associations. Once again, the Spirit has intervened in the history of the Church, raising up new charisms that possess an extraordinary missionary dynamism which responds in an opportune way to the challenges of our time, great and dramatic as they are.”

In the same inaugural address, he referred to St. John Paul II who, during his pontificate, never ceased to express his deep conviction that the ecclesial movements were the expression of a 'new missionary advent', of a 'great Christian springtime' prepared by God as the third millennium of the Redemption approached. For him, the ecclesial movements and the new communities of faith that had emerged in the last century, such as Teams of Our Lady, were bearers of a precious evangelising potential, which the Church urgently needs today.

John Paul II said:

"Often in today's world, which is dominated by a secular culture that proposes models of life without God, the faith of many is greatly tested and often suffocated and put out. Therefore, there is an urgent need for strong testimony and Christian formation that is solid and deep. What a great need there is today for mature Christian personalities who are aware of their baptismal identity, of their call and mission in the Church and in the world!

Christ in founding his Church established a clear and concise mission: "Make disciples". This is the mission of yesterday, today and tomorrow, which is the core of our vocation as Christians, the core of the Church and the core of our movement.

The 'Agora' of our evangelising mission is in every environment where we can bring light, we can heal wounds and we can make disciples as the Lord has asked us to do. This emanates from the gift we have received, and for which we have been formed by understanding and living the graces of the Sacrament of Marriage and the charism of married spirituality.

The TEAMS OF OUR LADY, as John Paul II alluded to, are mature Christian personalities, conscious of their baptismal identity, of their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world. This is our primary ecclesiological reason for being. This journey is nourished by the orientations of life that guide us, by the tools that the movement offers us, and by the light that our holy pontiff and the shepherds who care for their flock, give us.

We ask Our Lady for her protection and her intercession so that, following her example, we may have the acceptance to do what He tells us, always being faithful to our charism and our mission,

May it be so,

Clarita and Edgardo Bernal

International Responsible Couple.