

Father Henri Caffarel's Talk Given in São Paulo in 1962

Hereafter is a translation of a talk given by Father Henri Caffarel in São Paulo in 1962; it is an excerpt from a book entitled, "Fazer E Viver. Eis o Desafio," ('Doing and Experiencing. Here is the Challenge,' untranslated in English) written by Maria Regina & Carlos Eduardo Heise, that is currently in the process of being copy-edited in Portuguese. Our gratitude goes to Afra & Beto Slegers, the Correspondents of the Association of the Friends Caffarel for the Brazil Super-Region for bringing it to our attention.

"It's not about how much you do, but how much love you put into what you do that matters." (Saint Teresa of Calcutta)

We want to dedicate this chapter to the complete transcription of a talk that Father Henri Caffarel gave at Santa Cruz College in São Paulo, in 1962, during his second visit to our country. It seems to us that this talk originated in Mother Teresa's citation mentioned above. The interest that it raised, the seeking out of the few copies that were duplicated and, above all, the importance that it represents for a better understanding of the ideal of Teams of Our Lady led us to publish it in its entirety.

This talk that had a great impact at the time is still relevant. It was a talk given to Liaison Couples and to Pilot Couples. But it is very valuable for all Team members, whether they are Liaison or Pilot Couples or not. Despite it being a classical talk for the "formation" of these couples in particular, it is of great interest for each one of us Team members.

We would have liked to have annotated and highlighted different parts, but that could have partially distorted the author's wishes. Nonetheless, let us draw your attention to two aspects, amongst many others, that stand out in this text.

The first is the emphasis that Father Caffarel gives to the verb "to want."¹ Our Movement is made up of couples who want, who seek, who ardently desire. It is not for amateurs, as he said, but indeed for mature couples who are aware of their choice.

The second and not the least important aspect (according to us) is in the way he emphasises the understanding of "the spirit" as opposed to pure "legalism", to "doing", to "accomplishing" the rules, methods, pedagogy, rather than "experiencing and living them" and above all, with "love."

We truly hope you enjoy reading this text and that you reap the benefits from it, as was the case for us.

¹ "People (whose interior and exterior sense are alive) can find satisfaction in situations that others consider to be an obligation or a boring duty. They do not need to do; they want to. They are aware of the thorns, but concentrate on the roses." John POWELL, Para Viver em Plenitude, Editora Crescer, 4ª edição, p. 57.

THE IDEAL IN TEAMS OF OUR LADY

When a driver sees, on the right-hand side of the road, the warning on the road sign at the next crossing, they slow down and pay more attention. I wonder if we ought not to reproduce such a warning on the first page of the Teams of Our Lady brochure, that is given to people who might be interested in the movement.

Joining Teams of Our Lady is dangerous. And it is the Charter that currently represents the danger.

In the beginning we did not have a Charter. In fact, another danger threatened the Team members. The danger that threatens every movement in which there is a spirit, a mystique, but without the obligations² that help to live out and experience this spirit and mystique.

Today, thanks to the Charter, Team members feel that they are supervised and supported by the obligations/Endeavours. The danger would be to empty the obligations of their spirit. There are even couples who become attracted precisely by the idea of finding a rule in our movement.

What is to be feared is that the practice of the Rule becomes a goal, an ideal, a ceiling and that the Team members come to think that Christian perfection only consists in purely and simply respecting the obligations, which explains the easiness and possibility of attaining perfection by means of some effort, which explains the self-satisfaction, good conscience. The feeling of being a “just one”... Who does not see the danger in this state of mind?

Recently, I received a letter that proves that such a danger is not imaginary. It was from a couple who were 45 years old and who were of great human and spiritual maturity. This is what they wrote, “Furthermore, we are going to leave Teams of Our Lady. We felt stifled: we got the feeling that it was a closed world concentrated on the small problems of certain kinds of people from a certain background, of a world that did not want to see the true demands of the evangelical ideal... and following the Charter some days became a hypocritical screen that easily made us feel self-satisfied, leaving our eyes and ears closed to the problems of today’s society.”

More than once, as I have travelled through France, have I heard criticism of Teams of Our Lady: they have been accused of being closed, of making up a “clan of just and good people,” a “sect of pure people.” I am sure that the majority of Teams do not deserve this accusation. However that does not stop me asking myself the following scary question, “Will our Teams of Our Lady form Christians or will they produce Pharisees?”

II — How can we prevent this danger?²

² In the original text, paragraph ‘I’ is missing.

Although I am extremely conscious of the danger than threatens us, I must confess that I sometimes called into question our conception of the Movement.

Sometimes I wonder if it would not have been better to leave those six thousand couples without a Movement. Maybe they would have been great sinners, but undoubtedly they would have been more humble.

Sometimes I wonder if we ought not have settled for a Movement that would give a demanding mystique, an ideal to be attained, one that would be possible to get closer to, but that we could not achieve completely. The advantage of this would have been to always maintain a beneficial worry in our minds.

Or again, I wonder if couples ought to only stay for a few years in Teams. That would awaken in them the desire for an ever more Christian life; the guidelines for sanctification in secular life and in marriage would be offered to them, then the Team would disband. You do not spend your whole life in the seminary.

But in truth, I do not believe that the solution is to be found in innovations. The antidote to the danger that I analysed is to be found in the Charter. The first part of the Charter answers this question, Teams of Our Lady- Why?

Sometimes, we call this beginning of the Charter the preamble. I propose that we give up this name. Indeed, what is a preamble? The dictionary says, "What is said or written before, in order to announce what comes after. The preamble of a decree, a law, the preface in which the legislator sets out the purpose of the new regulation." A preamble to the Charter would specify the purpose of the Charter.

Yet, the first pages of the Charter are truly pages from the Charter and are not a preamble. The first part and not a preamble. The main part that defines the *raison d'être*, the purpose, the aim of Teams. The other parts define the means to reach this aim. Naming it in the preamble would run the risk of neglecting it. We do not always read the preface of a book. The preface is not the essence of a book.

This first part is undoubtedly the least original part and yet I insist that it is the most important. The least original. Fortunately, I would say, because it is dangerous to seek originality in this area. Indeed, the aim of this first part is to present a summary of Christian perfection for all Christian couples. Any couples' Movement that aims to lead its members to an ever more Christian life could fearlessly adopted this summary of married Christian spirituality.

What is original in our Charter is the means adopted to achieve the purpose that the first part shows us. Yet, it must be said that that this first part is the most important part. Without it, we could have all the rest, the means could be known, but the means would not guide or orient. We would have a car, but would not know the destination to reach and then the means would become an end, and holiness would be nothing more than the perfect practice of the means. We fall back into the danger we

perceived. Thanks to the first part, the means are oriented towards the perfection of Christian life and protect us from making them into the purpose.

III — An Annotated Reading of the First Part (of the Charter) A – General Comments In the thirteen first paragraphs of this first part, the verb “ils veulent” (“they want”) appears eight times.

Actually, to be more exact, this expression is replaced twice by a synonym, but that is only because of literary scruples. Once, “they intend” is used instead of “they want,” and another time, “they agree to serve without hesitation.”

They want is very important. They proclaim: we cannot attain or manage to do ... but we are striving towards, we are determined to manage to do it. This word challenges the attitude of those who believe that they have managed, are up-to-date, are settled. This word challenges self-satisfaction. This word that appears like an insistent refrain is an admission of helplessness; if we strive towards something, it is because we have not yet arrived nor managed to do it. It is the secret spring that motivates everything that is done in Teams.

Note that it does not refer to a vague intention—the proverb says that the road to hell is paved with good intentions—but expresses a deliberate, voluntary, vigorous tension. “They want” and not “They wanted”; today they want. The tension that these terms express must never falter because the goal towards which one strives can become closer, but is never attained, because it is a question in essence of “being perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect!”

Whoever in Teams renounces progress, thwarts the fundamental commitment expressed by the words “they want.” Whatever the spiritual altitude reached, you must always strive towards more. What makes a being worthy is not the altitude they reached, but the momentum, the tension that moves them. This is what this word from the first part of the Charter expresses.

B – Layout of the First Part I have numbered the paragraphs of the first part of the Charter from 1 to 16 and I invite you to do the same.

1 – Personal Christian Life (paragraphs 1- 4)

“They intend to fulfil their baptismal vows.”

For a Christian, the commitment of baptism is the fundamental commitment of their existence. All other commitments are nothing more than modest means to help fulfil this primary commitment: the scout’s promise, religious vows.

“They give themselves unconditionally to Him.”

This means renewing the commitment of baptism. For those who love, there is only one way of giving oneself, unconditionally. Whoever imposes a condition leaves the order of love and enters that of negotiation.

“They are determined to live for Christ, with Christ, and in Christ. »

“For” designates the aim: I work to earn money, I work for my children. The goal to reach is to reach Christ. In all acts. This does not prevent me from having an intermediary end as long as I am not in contradiction with Christ. I can work for my children, but that does not stop me from working for Christ.

“With,” in the company of, beside, in collaboration with. Christian life is a life together with Christ.

“In,” because of, “Just as (...) I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.” Christ will be the source of all my acts; he will be the soul of my soul.

“They agree to serve Him without hesitation.”

To love means doing the other person’s will, it means cooperating with their work, it means serving them. In our language, the word ‘serve’ does not contain the richness of meaning that it has in the Bible. Serving here means cooperating in the worship of God, with his work. This is the Messiah’s great title, “The Servant of Yahweh.” It is the title to which Mary aspires, “I am the Lord’s servant.” It is in this sense that the sentence I have just read, “They agree to serve Him without hesitation,” must be understood.

“Members of Teams of Our Lady intend to fulfil their baptismal vows,” but they also will receive another sacrament, marriage. And they intend to live and experience it in fullness.

2 – Couples’ Christian Life (paragraphs 5-9)

“They acknowledge Him as Lord and Master of their home.”

18 This little cell of the Church, called the home, as John XXII reminded us in Rome, has Christ as its head. The father and mother are nothing more than Christ’s representatives. Lord of their home: see in the word, “Lord,” the biblical sense that amounts to “God.” Christ tells couples the same thing that God in other times told the Jewish people, “I will be your God and you will be my People.”

“They base their family life on His Gospel.”

The Charter is the “fundamental rule,” it is the dictionary definition. It is neither the code of good conduct, nor the code of good education, it is the Gospel that must be the Charter of the home, that everything must refer to. The Gospel, that little book

that is a cause for anxiety, that frees from any desire to settle down and from any threat of self-satisfaction.

“They want their love, sanctified by the sacrament of matrimony, to give glory to God,”

Just as a masterpiece is the artist’s glory.

“To bear witness to men that Christ has redeemed love,”

Thank you to those who seek to recognise it, “But then, love really exists!” Yes, the Christian home proclaims, because Christ came to save love.

“and to atone for sins against the marriage bond.”

So many couples live and experience only ordinary, impure and unfaithful love. Teams’ couples want to add a supplement of love, purity and fidelity to their homes to make up for the terrible deficit of love in so many other couples.

3 –Service to the Church (paragraphs 10-11)

The Christian home wants to be a cell of this great body that is the Church. But be careful that it does not become a cancer. Cancer refers to those cells who live to the detriment of the whole body.

“They aim to be missionaries of Christ at all times and in all places.”

Mission is one of the great words of Christianity. The Father sends his Son among men, he bears a mission. Christ sends his apostles. The Church sends every Christian, every couple. And note the phrase, “in all places.” Indeed, it is at work, in moments of distraction, in public transport, in union activities, politics etc. that Teams of Our Lady members must consider themselves to be in service, bearing a mission and being constant in prayer.

“They wish to express their devotion to the Church by being always ready to respond to the requests of their clergy and bishops.”

Anxious to be called to cooperate with the hierarchy and the priests for the advent of the Kingdom, Teams’ couples must be “always ready.” But beware, this does not exempt them from being discerning in their devotion. It would be a mistake, under the pretext of devotion, to neglect the essential values of religious and human culture, the deepening of their conjugal intimacy and the faithful fulfilment of their duties as parents.

4 – Service to the City (paragraphs 12-13)

Avoiding serving the City, or assuming temporal functions under the pretext of having an interior or apostolic life would be a lack of understanding of one’s responsibility as a

lay Christian. This is why the Charter states, “They strive to be competent in their professional calling and daily work.”

From the worker to the statesperson, one must want to be perfect in their profession. Christ was undoubtedly the best carpenter in Nazareth.

“They desire to turn all their activities into a collaboration with God in His work and in the service of mankind.”

The Charter therefore invites us to consider the temporal functions in their highest sense. It is not just about making a living.

Here then is the Christian ideal of the couple, presented in four paragraphs—Personal Christian Life, Couples’ Christian Life, Service to the Church, Service to the City— that members of Teams of Our Lady want to achieve, or more precisely want to strive for. It is easy to see how unjust the accusation is of those who claim that in Teams of Our Lady we only think of marriage. This first part of the Charter clearly demonstrates our ambition to discover all the requirements of Christian life, to form an integral Christian.

Since we feel weak before this ideal, we rely on mutual support between couples; it is even, in a certain sense, the *raison d’être* of the Movement, hence the last sentences of this first part of the Charter.

5 – The Purpose of Team Life (paragraphs 14-16)

“Because they are aware of their weaknesses and limitations, because they experience daily how difficult it is to live up to the Christian ideal in our modern world, because they have unflinching faith in the power of fellowship and mutual help, they have decided to form themselves into Teams.”

20 IV - Conclusion I was telling you that the best antidote against the danger of self-satisfaction for us is this first part of the Charter that lays out before our eyes the goal to be achieved. I believe that you are now convinced of this after the analysis that I have just given.

I cannot however hide my concern from you. It comes back to me insistently in the form that I described in the beginning: are our Teams going to form true Christians or produce Pharisees? It is a permanent danger, because we always run the risk of losing sight of the first part of the Charter in order to only see the obligations. 4

There is an example in the religious history of humanity. A century before our era, frightened by Hellenic influence and the infiltration of Greek paganism, which threatened the purity of Israel’s institutions and Jewish consciences, some deeply religious Israelites founded a spiritual movement. They were heirs to the great prophets. Like them they refused to make peace with the pagans and did not hesitate to face martyrdom. They multiplied the obligations in order to support their religious

life, to find the means to reach a more perfect religion, they fervently hoped for the Messiah's arrival.

And when Christ came, they were the most impervious to his word, becoming his worst enemies. Christ was at his hardest with them, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean."

What is the explanation for this tragic failure? It is because they forgot the mystique, since they only preserved the obligations from their Rule. They fulfilled these obligations and were happy with themselves, and considered themselves to be righteous and in no need of a Saviour. When he came, they crucified him.

This tragic story could become the story of any spirituality movement: if our rule, if our Charter does not succeed in making us acquire an acute awareness that we are sinners, unable to save ourselves, it runs the serious risk of turning us into Pharisees, the people cursed by Christ.

I can offer you an infallible test to check whether the evil of Phariseeism has already contaminated you. After a few years in a Team, do the couples have the feeling that they are sinners, vulnerable and threatened, more so than when they entered the movement? Are they afraid? Do they despair of themselves? Do they turn to Christ the Saviour with a greater hope than before?

The only way for your Teams, the only way for each couple to escape this danger is to compare life itself often to the first part of the Charter. Then they will become fully aware of the distance that separates them from perfection; then they will be unable to stop renewing the will to reach this perfection; then they will be able to count of the grace of Christ and not on their own selves.

May the Virgin Mary, to whom we pray together every night, obtain for all Team members the grace of graces: that of being humble, or in more biblical terms, of being "poor in spirit."

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "

Canon Henri Caffarel