

# THE LETTER



## OF FRIENDS OF FATHER CAFFAREL

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ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS OF CAFFAREL  
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## EDITORIAL

### **Message Father Caffarel on prayer.**

Maria-Carla and Carlo Volpini



We know the importance that Father Caffarel attached to prayer. He consecrated all his life to it. He taught us to approach prayer with love. He has always underlined the necessity of this encounter with the Lord.

It was this attention to prayer that led him to entrust to someone else the leadership of the Movement of Equipes Notre-Dame so as to devote his last years totally to this fundamental aspect of the Christian life in his retreat house at Troussures.

To learn to pray, to know how to prayer and to make our life a life of prayer is unquestionably the way to grow spiritually. Indeed, we know that it is in this mysterious and intense encounter with the Lord that our faith is lived.

There is an aspect that Father Caffarel has highlighted in one of his letters and which gives new meaning to prayer and to getting close to God with particular confidence. He reminded us of this aspect with the words:

*“God is expecting you!”*

At every moment of our life, at every moment of our day, at every moment of our journey, we know that God is waiting for us. This certainty must always be with us and must make us live out our times of prayer with more simplicity and joy.

How can we not join with serenity the One who is waiting for us patiently, peacefully and faithfully? How can we not be ready to speak to Him, reveal everything to Him and entrust all our being to him? He is there, waiting, just to welcome us with love.

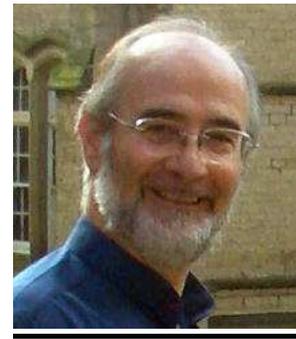
Our life is spent in expectation, knowing that our plans, our hopes, our faith and our expectations will be fulfilled. Faith also is a great expectation: the expectation of the Lord and of his Kingdom to come. During his life on earth, Jesus has continually fulfilled other peoples' expectations. He has given them new hope, renewed their trust, healed their wounds and loved them.

Father Caffarel reminds us "*God is expecting you; he is there to give you new hope, to give you confidence, to heal your wounds, to fill your emptiness.*"

And thus prayer becomes life.

**Father Caffarel  
and the meaning of sexuality.**

*Father Angelo Epis  
Spiritual Counsellor of the  
International Leading Team*



There is a deep division in our culture on the subject of marriage and sexuality. By his teaching and writings, Father Caffarel has confronted this ever-present question.

These words of this elderly priest are significant: *“Formerly, it was simpler; the rules were clear. Before marriage: no sexual relationships. In marriage: no playing around, no deviation! The teaching of the Church was not questioned. Divorce was out of the question. It was clear. It was only a matter of forming the conscience of the faithful and of being merciful when failings occurred. Young people today do not seem to me to be any worse than in former times. Conscience has not disappeared, but we have changed the way we apply it. My words as a priest were acknowledged and respected when I spoke of God’s law in sexual matters. This is no longer the case today. I feel in a different world”*.

Sexuality means “to divide in two”! Thus it seems that, among Christians, there is a rupture, great incomprehension, recriminations and silence. The subject of sexuality is censured, often confused, often ideological. This stems from the fact that this subject is not discussed, not seen in relation to other things, not treated in a human way... Father Caffarel’s idea was to ask questions and to treat sexuality from a human point of view. His answer was not to make definitive statements but invite people to question themselves.

He offered a fascinating journey “from sexuality to love”. The way

sexual life is regulated is very important for the humanisation of human beings. A well lived out sexuality can contribute to the building up of men and women. If it is not well lived out, it can damage the life and humanity of men and women. Under God's reign, sexuality and faithfulness cannot be dissociated. It is a decisive step in establishing a relationship with God. It is a rich and profound dimension of our personality that allows us to enter into communion with one another. This explains two apparently surprising statements in the New Testament:

1. On the one hand, the teaching that celibacy is a way of living the sexual life,
2. On the other hand, the call, in the light of the Kingdom, to give first place to the Lord before the union of man and woman and before the union of parents and children.

The dream of a very close union of the couple is deeply rooted today. This dream is uprooted by the call of Christ and by the light He casts on human sexuality.

Love is the law of sexuality and characterises the union between man and woman. Love is being different; love is sacrifice; love is built up over time through successes and failures.

It is in the couple that the three aspects of sexuality are expressed: relationship, pleasure and fecundity. The couple can only grow through a balanced integration of these three dimensions of sexuality.

The growth of love has no time limit. The perfect couple does not exist. What do exist are people, couples who are always in search of perfection. The full blossoming of sexuality is never achieved. For Christians, it is a gift received from the Holy Spirit, acting from within. God does not identify holiness with perfection. For example, those who experience failures and shortcomings in love can build up a relationship with God, provided they can overcome these shortcomings, when possible.

It is written in the Bible that love between man and woman is the greatest symbol of the Love of God for humanity. According to the Bible, sexuality is not sacred but is called to express and deepen the couple's

relationship with the Lord. The connection between faith and sexuality is something particular to Christians. Christian husbands and wives are united “*in the Lord*” (1 Cor 7: 39). The love they have for one another in Christ does not replace sexual love. It is not superimposed on it. It has its own significance. Love lived out in faith is the ultimate meaning of sexuality.

The true meaning of sexuality and the basis on which to measure its value is the human being, created and liberated by God, in relationship to his/her neighbour. Human beings, liberated by Christ, are called to live out their sexuality in freedom, but in a responsible freedom. Sexuality is liberated in Jesus Christ in its own right and is lived out in relationship to one’s neighbour and to God. It is destined to become a language of love, of communion and of life.

## Note from the Postulator

### **Giving one's testimony**

Father Paul-Dominique Marcovits , o.p.



A canonisation is always a confirmation, by the Church, of the People of God's conviction of the holiness of one of its members. We remember how John-Paul II was acclaimed as a saint at his death and of the unanimous worldwide opinion of the holiness of Mother Teresa. What does the People of God think about Father Caffarel? What do we think deepdown? Is Father Caffarel still alive for us? Is he a priest who still gives us God's life, who still casts light for us on the sacrament of marriage and on Holy Orders? Is he a master who teaches us to pray? Do his writings on marriage and on prayer give us life? Do we pray to him?

Those who knew Father Caffarel give us their testimony. Those who did not know him, or rather those who know him from his writings and by his teaching on marriage or on prayer, can also give testimony. These testimonies are important because they show Father Caffarel's "reputation for holiness": he is a light for the Church and for the world.

Here is our request: if for you, personally, Father Caffarel is "a living person" today, thanks to his writings or to his intercession through prayer, do write to us. Your testimonies will show his reputation for holiness. Likewise, tell us if a cure has occurred thanks to his intercession, it will also be a sign that the Lord wants Father Caffarel to be an even greater light for the Church and for the world

Father Marcovits, op

*To write to the Postulator:*

*by post to the address of the Association (see cover)*

*by e-mail: [postulateur@henri-caffarel.org](mailto:postulateur@henri-caffarel.org)*

## **Current situation of the Association :** **membership, finances**

Philippe Deney  
Treasurer



At the end of December 2008, what is the situation regarding memberships and renewals of membership?

A number of decisions were taken in the course of 2008 to enlist the support of team members throughout the world for the cause of Father Caffarel. It would appear indeed normal that it is within Teams that one finds the greatest number of people influenced by the work he did. Furthermore, it is at the initiative of the International Leading Team that the cause of beatification of Father Caffarel was launched. It was therefore decided, at the meeting of the International College of Teams in Fatima in July 2008, that every country where Teams are represented should appoint a Correspondant with the Friends of Father Caffarel who would be responsible to promote this association, to enlist new members and to administer their contributions and renewal of membership. Furthermore, the office of the association in Paris has taken on a part-time secretary in October 2008, Patricia Chapellier. This will make it possible to know better the true spread of our association and to increase its membership.

What we know precisely is the number of members registered by the association in Paris, namely 458 couples or single persons. This is an increase of one hundred since the end of 2007. The level of renewal of contributions is relatively low and stands at around 20%. The increase in membership in other countries is not yet known but we know that Brazil has at least 500 members. There is still a lot to be done and, as we said to you at the end of 2007, joining the association is a concrete testimony of the importance of this cause. You must therefore approach your friends and relatives and enlist new members.

We rely on all of you.

## Archives

### Letter on quiet prayer

by Father Caffarel



*This year, the orientation for the year suggested to team members of the France-Luxemburg-Switzerland Super-Region is Quiet Prayer.*

*We are carrying on therefore with our extracts from “Booklets on Quiet Prayer (Initiation V)” with a letter by Father Caffarel written in February 1967.*

### **The essential**

You write to me that you have been “*Faithful for the past six months to the practice of daily quiet prayer but that you are not sure of having had more than four or five good ones*”. What do you mean? Do you mean that, apart from these four or five, all your attempts did not please the Lord? You don’t really know. I am well prepared to believe that they did not give you personal satisfaction. But does it follow from this that they were not good? I beg you not to let yourself be caught in the trap, that all beginners fall into, of judging your prayer on the basis of fervour, recollection, beautiful thoughts or tangible results. The same applies to quiet prayer as to the sacraments: its value and efficacy are of the supernatural order and are, therefore, beyond human evaluation.

If you have properly understood what constitutes the essential aspect of quiet prayer, you would not be discouraged by what you call “the assault of distractions”.

Quiet prayer is a complex exercise. Our whole being is involved: body, soul, intelligence, heart and freedom. But it is important to discern correctly what is essential: that which, if lacking, strips quiet prayer of all value.

- Is it the part the body plays? Obviously no. Otherwise we would have to say that paralysed persons couldn't pray because they cannot adopt an attitude of prayer. This would be absurd.
- Is it the words we use? It is all too clear that words in prayer, as in human relationships, can never be the essential element.
- Is it sensitivity or fervour? But that is very disappointing since it takes so little to upset our sensitivity: a worry, a pain, a joy, a passion, a toothache... Indeed it is not conceivable that the value of our prayer should be at the mercy of the least event, interior or exterior.
- Is it our reflection? True, meditation is important: knowing God arouses our love of God. But if it is the essence of quiet prayer, someone who is not very intellectually gifted would be condemned to mediocre prayers and only intelligent people would achieve perfection.
- Is it attentiveness to God? If that is the case, you will slip into despair since you are “assaulted by distractions”. Very often, it does not depend on us to avoid them; like our feelings, our attentiveness is particularly unstable. It is as difficult to keep our attention on God as it is to keep the needle of a compass pointing north as we walk.

So, what is left ? Our feelings : an ardent love, a lively trust, a deeply felt thankfulness ? It is true that our feelings, by comparison with our sensitivity and our imagination, are more stable. And yet, we must recognise that they, too, partly evade our control. We cannot command our feelings; the fervour of our heart does not depend on our decision.

So what is the essential aspect of prayer? It is the will. But, in this instance, do not see the will as a psychological mechanism that makes us take a decision, or that constrains us to do what displeases us. According to good philosophy, the will is the aptitude of our deeper self to focus freely on something good: a person, an ideal. It is “to commit ourselves” to use an expression dear to our generation. When our deeper self turns to God and freely and deliberately gives itself to him, it is then that there is true prayer, even if our sensitivity is dulled, our reflection of poor quality, our attention distracted. Our prayer is then worth the value of our focus and deep-seated self-giving.

Whereas sensitivity, attentiveness and even feelings are fleeting and changing, our will is infinitely more stable and permanent. The stirring of our sensitivity does not necessarily influence our will and the distractions of our imagination do not necessarily distract our will. You have only to consider your own experience. Has it never happened to you during quiet prayer to become suddenly aware of having been swept away into distractions, and then to return to your inner self and find calm and self control again, your will focussed on God and intent on pleasing him? Your will had not budged in any way.

To will to pray is to pray.

This saying, I know, has the knack of irritating those of our contemporaries who believe in the superstition of spontaneity. For them, everything that is self-imposed is artificial, conventional and sham; but I know you well enough to know that you do not adhere to this childishness.

Ideally it is true that prayer, springing from our deepest will, should involve our whole being. Indeed, no part of us should remain extraneous to our prayer – any more than to our love. God wants the whole of us: *“You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength”* (Lk 10: 27). Therefore we must try to banish extraneous noises and activities, to pull ourselves together and to recollect ourselves completely so as to offer ourselves totally. But fortunately, I repeat, it is not necessary to succeed therein for our quiet prayer to be of good quality.

If we want to succeed in eliminating distractions and agitations we must rely more on divine grace than on our own efforts. Nevertheless, it is good to know and practise a few classic rules:

- An elderly author (a bit of a misogynist on the edges) taught: “Distractions in quiet prayer is like women: do not pay attention to them and, very quickly, they will leave you alone!”
- To be sad at having had distractions is another way of being distracted.
- To write in your diary the thought that comes to mind is sometimes sufficient to get rid of it; for example: the telephone call we must not fail to make today...
- Choose the least favourable time for distractions; for many that is first thing in the morning.
- Write down your prayer to help the mind to concentrate when it is too agitated.
- Make the subjects of distraction subjects of prayer, for example, a grandson whose faith is shaky...

**Henri Caffarel**

## Testimony on Father Caffarel

### **Sofia Grijó**

*Sofia and Carlos Grijó have been married for 52 years and have 4 married children and 15 grandchildren. They have been in Teams for 48 years and belong to the 'Porto 6' team. They were the first Super-Regional Couple for Portugal.*

*They have known Father Caffarel and have worked mostly with Marie and Louis d'Amonville and with Father Tandonnet.*

We have learned and received so much from Father Caffarel that it seems impossible to us to bear witness to it!

When we were preparing for marriage, already over 50 years ago, I, Sofia, wanted to “convert” Carlos to “my” values. It was then that, in the review “Anneau d’Or”, I first came across suggested ideals on married spirituality and a happy marriage. It was something new in the Church’s teaching and they filled us with great enthusiasm for the life we were about to begin.

And yet, how far we were from imagining what would follow!

After we got married, we tried to live according to the suggestions that we had discovered. They helped us a lot. From the very beginning we had the happiness to welcome our 4 children one after the other. It was already Father Caffarel’s influence...

After approximately six years of marriage, two couple friends who were enthusiastic members of Teams, invited us to join the Movement.

And this is how we came to be members of our team...

It was the beginning of a deeper association based on the teaching of Father Caffarel who was the “inspiration” of the Movement.

It was a school of spiritual formation and mutual help for married life that immediately filled us with enthusiasm.

It was all that we wished: to belong to a Movement in the name of the Lord with other couples who shared our aims. We can truthfully say that we wanted, as a couple, to find the Lord, to know him better, to listen to what his Spirit wanted to tell us, to apply his teachings in our home, to experience his Presence and to find happiness in a different way as a couple and as a family.

Of all the suggestions, referred to as “methods” at the time, there was one we found that was particularly meant for us as a couple: the Sit-Down. It was an original method, particular to the Movement, conceived, like all the other methods, by Father Caffarel.

And in the end, that was the one that helped us most. It is the one that united us most, that allowed us to see the ‘reality’ of our life and that helped us to ‘journey’ in our married life, family life and in the World, faithful to the vocation that we were discovering little by little.

We were called over the years to assume responsibilities in Teams. (We recall that, at that time, Teams were not publicised as they are today).

In 1969, we took part in an International Meeting in Paris where we met the Sipsom and Vercruysse. They were couples that we remember well and who made a great impression on many of us. On the last day of the Meeting, Father Caffarel joined us. Was this small, fragile, discreet figure really Father Caffarel? We had difficulty in recognising in this person someone who was so big and important to us who “spoke” to us and suggested so many things and ideas!

That was until the end of his talk... It was then that we discovered that he was much more than anything we had imagined. By the way he spoke, he revealed himself as someone very familiar with the kind of people that we were: man and woman. He told us what it means “to be a couple”, what God wanted for us, the role of such a couple in the World and enjoying here and now a happiness that was possible.

We remember the way he taught us. It left a deep impression on us. We discovered over the years that it is only in God and with God that we are able to find the full extent and realisation of our greatest desires. This means having a true and indispensable intimacy with Him.

We met Father Caffarel a number of times and he always gave us some new insights. He used big Teams Gatherings to launch new challenges to Teams: “Ascesis”, “Teams at the service of the New Commandment”, “In the face of Atheism” (we see it’s relevance today), “His talk at Chantilly”, etc.

In 1976, he came to meet Portuguese-speaking couples. He spoke affectionately to all and showed them the chalice that Pope Paul VI had given him.

At meetings, closer to us, of Responsible Couples, Father Caffarel was not easy to approach. He was a good listener. He did not say or do things just to please. He was demanding out of faithfulness to the Holy Spirit and to the needs of couples. We have had the privilege of listening to him and speaking to him.

We felt that he had a rare and original sensitivity to the needs of the Church and of the World, and to human and spiritual reality past, present and to come. We truly believe that he was a “Prophet for our times”. We realise this sometimes, when reading the Teams Letters of the 60s and 70s, when he was still writing the Editorials. For us these texts are still of great relevance today.

He has left his stamp on the Movement that he initiated. We admire with what simplicity he retired from it. He never encouraged a cult of his personality. He entrusted the responsibility of the Movement to Marie and Louis d'Amonville who had worked closely with him for many years.

His whole life was opened to the Spirit of God and always disposed to help bring happiness and holiness into all situations, especially that of couples (differences between men and women, sexuality, problems, quiet prayer, asceticism, etc). He always remained open to the action of God in Times and Peoples.

Finally, we want to share with you, with a very profound feeling of gratitude, that we have at home, in our family living room, a photograph of Father Caffarel taken in Assisi in 1976. It is only last year that we received this photo.

We are calling on him in a very special way at present, praying and asking him to intercede with God and Our Lady at a rather difficult time for our family.

Sofia Grijó  
Porto, 26 November 2008



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<sup>1</sup> ERI : International Leading Team of Equipes Notre Dame

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THE CAUSE OF BEATIFICATION OF

**Father Henri CAFFAREL**

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