

## HOW TEAMS BEGAN

From “Vocation and Itinerary of Teams”  
1959 Rome Pilgrimage

Father Carré spoke to us on Saturday about the work of reflection on marriage that theologians have done in the course of the last twenty-five years. He sketched out the main outlines of this research. But this work of reflection by theologians has still to be translated into the life of couples. The Teams of Our Lady are working on it - indeed it is the reason for their existence. Great was our joy yesterday, therefore, to hear his Holiness Pope John XXIII approving our aim with all his eminent authority and paternal kindness, and encouraging us to pursue our efforts along the way we have chosen.

We want to respond to the Pope’s confidence but, to do so, it is important that we have a clear idea of our Movement’s objectives; hence the importance of this pause that our pilgrimage provides. It must lead us to become better aware of God’s will for our Movement, to ask ourselves how we have responded to his will and to resolve to correspond ever better to his will “in trust and humility” as the Holy Father advised us to do.

It is always a delicate matter to ask ourselves what is the will of God: we are liable to make him say what we want him to say. Yet nothing is more important.

Is it necessary for me to make clear that it was not by revelation that I got to know God’s will for our Movement? I tried to discover it bit by bit and to decipher it through day-to-day events – much in the same way as you, parents, try to discern the vocation of your children by paying attention to their evolution with attentive love. Since the far-off day when, as a young priest, I received the visit of a young couple who wanted to be helped in their journey to God, until today in the presence of your immense gathering, I have endeavoured to understand the needs and aspirations of Christian couples and to discern in them the movements of divine grace, so as to help them to correspond to it joyfully and generously.

I will not hide from you that I have experienced difficult times: what are the desires and aspirations that must be satisfied because they are orientated towards progress and spiritual growth? And what are those that must be opposed because they tend towards mediocrity and aimlessness?

I propose today to outline for you the principal phases our Movement has been through during these past twenty years, so as to help us to discern God’s guiding hand over us and so as to grasp what I would confidently call the “Vocation of Teams”. I detect five phases in our history which we will review successively.

### THE BEGINNING

Let us go up the river to its source; there you will find four young couples, full of their newfound love and, being deeply convinced Christians, they did not intend to live out their love apart from their faith. Though lacking precise ideas on the doctrine of Christian marriage, a very strong intuition filled them with hope and led them to see a priest. They told me: *“This human love which is our joy and treasure, God must surely see it as something very beautiful and very great. We want to know about it – you must reveal it to us”*.

Listening to them, I had no difficulty in guessing that I would cruelly disappoint them if I were to give them only legalistic definitions and moral rules. In similar circumstances, I had already attracted a disappointed and ironical retort: *“We speak to you of love and you reply family!”*.

I was not much more knowledgeable than my visitors. Nevertheless, I was convinced that, since love comes from God and marriage is a divine institution, the divine concept of love and of marriage must be infinitely more exciting than anything these young men and

women could imagine. My response was: “*Let us seek together; let us join together and set off on a journey of discovery*”.

They were unforgettable meetings: the same atmosphere of joyful elation as when one sets out at dawn for a walk in the mountain on a beautiful summer day. Everyone contributed what they had to offer: the priest, his knowledge about marriage and Christian doctrine as a whole, the couples, their experience of their springtime of love and marriage. There was no doubt that, to find what we were looking for, we were not to limit ourselves to biological, psychological or sociological considerations and we had to go beyond only legal and moral points of view. If, as Saint Paul declares, marriage is a ‘great mystery’, only the eyes of faith can penetrate its divine treasure. And so our meetings proceeded in an atmosphere of lively, curious and enthusiastic faith.

Little by little, the eminent place of marriage in God’s great design unfolded. It seemed to us to be totally ordained to the glory of the Lord. Its ends are the multiplication of sons and daughters of God and the mutual help of the spouses in the pursuit of holiness. There is no need to look elsewhere in order to progress towards the Lord: marriage is a sacred way and the Christian family is a living cell of the Church.

Not only is marriage part of God’s design, it also reveals its treasures. This was one of the most joyful discoveries of these young minds, hungry for knowledge. With what care and attention they applied themselves to decipher the parable of marriage! It was to marriage that the prophets had often turned to explain God’s Covenant with his people Israel. It was to marriage that Saint Paul himself referred in order to give us a glimpse of Christ’s union with his Church; and after him, the mystics found no better way than the parable of married love to reveal the intimacy of love between Christ and the Christian soul.<sup>1</sup>

There was still more to be discovered. Christian marriage, being a sacrament, not only represents the union between Christ and the Church, but makes the couple participants in this union. By this I mean that, thanks to the sacrament of marriage, the love that binds Christ to the Church is the very same love that works to unite and give life and joy to the spouses.

### **Lessons of Phase 1**

We had only been going for a year when the great ordeal burst upon us. Our group and each of the couples in it were torn apart as the men<sup>2</sup> left for war service. But an experience of capital importance had been made in that first year from which I would like briefly to draw lessons since they explain future orientations.

I had perceived and have outlined how to present the doctrine of Christian marriage to young couples if one wants to persuade them to step out eagerly along their married path to God. I need not dwell further on that aspect.

At the same time, I found the explanation for the classic phenomenon that distresses priests as well as couples themselves, namely the decline of Christian life at the beginning of married life. Having perceived the explanation, the remedy became apparent. This decline comes from the fact that young couples dissociate human love from divine love, failing to see the link between them. But,

- if they are shown that it is not necessary to diminish the one to enhance the other and that human love must lead to divine love and divine love to loving one’s spouse;
- and if they understand that, not only is marriage sanctified by the sacrament of marriage, but that marriage becomes sanctifying,

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this thinking on marriage was new to couples at the time and only became widespread following the Second Vatican Council.

<sup>2</sup> Including Father Caffarel

then entering into marriage will no longer result in a weakening of Christian life, but will be a new start. The spouses do not, for all that, have to wait for the first disappointment before turning to God!

No less evident, I realised, was the fruitfulness of the collaboration between priest and couples. Nor was I alone in realising this, for so did the couples. One of them had understood this well when she thanked God in her prayer for “the marriage of our two sacraments”. The priest contributes doctrine and the couple their experience; from this combination grew an art of living married life in a Christian way.

It was not only between the couples and the priest that bonds had been created, but between the couples themselves. They had discovered by experience that nothing unites people more than seeking together the mind of God; and nothing is more necessary than this union for couples who want to progress in this search so as to live by it more and more.

Another lesson came out from our experience of the place that prayer had assumed in our meetings: just as a ray of light is reflected back to its source when it strikes a mirror, similarly, if the truth that comes from God falls on hearts that are upright and pure, it is immediately reflected back to God in the form of prayer.

I am sure that, as you listened to me, you have understood the origin of some essential aspects of your team life.

The phase I have just described (the birth of Teams) had taken place in a climate of springtime joy: young couples, their newfound love, the grace of the sacrament of marriage in its first outpouring.

The second phase began in Paris in 1940 in an atmosphere of disaster. But it was the same vital instinct that led couples to a priest, namely the need to save their love. They had heard of pre-war experiments - the one I have just described and several others – and they too wanted to set out on the same journey.

The life of these wartime groups was similar to that of the first group but took place in a more sober atmosphere. With time it grew and deepened.

### **Married spirituality**

The children increased in numbers and grew up. Married life uncovered new riches and experienced unexpected trials; material difficulties and the dangers overshadowing the country threaten these families. Will their faith in God, in their married love, in life itself survive?

It did survive. Our couples proved that the erosion of time does not corrode those who are opened to eternal values. Nevertheless, if their love – their love of God and mutual love – was to grow, couples must grow in their knowledge of God and of his designs. Did this mean that it was time for them to go beyond the doctrine of marriage and to broaden their search in other spheres? Yes and no. Once again, it is by deepening their knowledge of the doctrine of marriage that they would discover the other aspects of Catholic teaching. They understood in fact that one must not isolate marriage from the totality of that teaching, but rather to place it in the crossfire of the great doctrines: Trinitarian Life, Redemptive Incarnation, the Mystical Body, liturgical and sacramental life... In the light of these and of the great news they revealed to them, marriage was leading them to a better knowledge of the mysteries of Christianity.

Critics did not spare them: what is the point of spending so much time in study and meditation? Their very existence provided the answer: marriage and Christian truths, becoming better known, were lived out better by them.

It was then that emerged what was called “married and family spirituality” or “the spirituality of the married Christian”. These expressions became rapidly popular, even though they contained an ambiguity. They could be interpreted as: how can one live out the realities

of married and family life in a Christian way? Or: how can one live out all the demands of the Christian life in the married state? As members of the Teams of Our Lady, you know that we have chosen this second interpretation.

How can one live out all the demands of the Christian life *in the married state*? It is the second part of this sentence that causes problems. Prayer, charity, self-denial, poverty, chastity, apostolate are incumbent on all Christians, whether married or not. It became however evident in our meetings that these virtues are not to be lived out by married Christians in the same way as they are by monks. Otherwise, they would soon be seen to be impracticable. For the mother obliged by her children to get up in the middle of the night, asceticism does not consist in wearing a hair shirt. For the couple, evangelical poverty sometimes consists in accepting another child and chastity does not consist in refraining from sexual relations but in making proper use of them.

It was thrilling to seek the principles and rules of life on which the spirituality of a married Christian is based. And so it was during these sombre years that the revue "L'Anneau d'Or" (the Golden Ring) was being prepared. Established in 1945, at the end of this wartime phase, it sought to make known to many couples the art of living marriage in a Christian way: its daily tasks and Christian home life. We had gradually worked it out in our meetings.

### **The bond of Christian love in a team**

Another area where a deepening of Christian life manifested itself during these war years was that of friendship between couples. Helped by the joy of discoveries made together, friendship had arisen spontaneously in our first (pre-war) group. In the sombre climate of the war years, friendship discovered more deeply the demands of charity in Christ. Under some form or another, all couples experienced some trial. Material privation was not the most painful. The absence of the father, made prisoner or deported, was very painfully felt in many homes. Death had robbed others of the head of the family. In these circumstances, they understood that the essence of charity is mutual help: giving material and human comfort to brothers and sisters in Christ to help them to respond fully to the will of God and to carry out their human and Christian mission to the best of their ability. Those who experienced these years of intense fraternal charity have retained a certain nostalgia for them. As life becomes easier, mutual help often tends to decline.

How enlightening it was then for me to observe that, inviting husbands and wives to love each other better in their marriage and inviting couples to love one another within their team, did not encourage "isolationism", as some feared it would - far from it! When the human heart is rash enough to open itself to the love of Christ, this love enlarges the heart to the dimensions of the Church and of the world. Indeed, to teach spouses to love each other better and couples to help one another is to initiate them to the love of all human beings, even of enemies. I have in mind the widow who asked me to celebrate mass for the airman who dropped the bomb that killed her husband. I remember these words written by one of you who had escaped from a concentration camp: "It was not in spite of my family responsibilities but precisely because I was a husband and father that I volunteered to take part in this conflict". Many are the times I have seen men and women in our groups who, having discovered the needs and difficulties of members of their team, were led to become aware of the inhuman conditions of life in which millions of couples live (conditions that make the pursuit of the Christian ideal of marriage, if not impossible, at least very difficult). They were also led to understand their imperative duty to get involved in social activities.

### **The prayer of petition**

Finally, on the subject of prayer, a deepening could be noted. It sprang spontaneously in the pre-war group, like praise in the face of beauty. Now, prayer was sought after for its own sake; it became indispensable. Who did not feel weak and vulnerable in the face of so

worrying a future? We discovered then the humble prayer of petition. Those of you, who belonged to Teams in those distant years, have kept an unforgettable memory of those evening totally spent in prayer – sometimes lasting all night! I can still remember the telephone call of a young wife, terribly distressed, telling me that her husband had just been arrested and deported. All the couples of her team were immediately informed and, that night, prayer never stopped in her home. Those who felt too tired would simply go to sleep for a while, the women in one room, the men in another. They parted company after mass, celebrated at six o'clock in a neighbouring church, leaving the wife and her children in peace and trust. These recollections do not fail to awake a certain shame for our tepidity today. Perhaps, fewer dangers threaten us personally, but is our world in less need of prayers?

## **THE CRISIS**

The war ends; prisoners return; groups of couples are in fashion and multiply - a success to be feared. Do couples join them because they are anxious to deepen their Christian life? It was not obvious. In some cases, it seemed that it was out of curiosity, or the attraction of human friendship, or out of snobbishness... Add to this the fact that the long-standing members - those of the heroic phase – were tempted to let up in the euphoria of the return of peace and of comfortable old friendships. Had the wonderful enthusiasm that had animated the first groups been already exhausted? So much hope had been placed in the formation of groups of couples; should the idea be abandoned?

There was a crisis, but all crises do not lead to failure. How often in our group meetings, as we reflected on the development of married love or when studying the development of children, we have noticed this phenomenon of crises in the growth of all living persons and that they lead to progress or regression, depending on whether they are dealt with well or badly. What did we need to do for the crisis facing our groups to bring about a self-surpassing and more mature phase? What might the will of God be?

## **THE CHARTER OF THE TEAMS**

I make no secret of the fact that it was the history of the Church, the study of religious life that inspired a solution to me. I wondered what could explain that holiness never ceased to blossom and re-blossom in religious orders in the course of time, despite internal and external crises; and I understood that one of the essential factors for the long lasting quality and vitality of these orders was their rule. Why, I then asked myself, should we not offer a rule to married Christians who want to progress spiritually? – not a rule for monks, but a rule for married lay men and women.

I then said to the small leading team I had around me: “Let us run the risk of losing three quarters of our numbers if faithfulness to the vocation of Teams demands it”.

What orientation should we give to this rule? More spiritual, putting the accent on the Gospel ideal? More binding, setting out obligations? No doubt these two points of view needed to be reconciled. This is why your rule, the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady, sets out, in its first part, the objectives we must strive after and, in its second part, the means of working towards these objectives: the methods and obligations.

During this important phase of our history that our pilgrimage to Rome represents, it seems necessary to me to explain to you the deep significance of the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady. I could have begun with this presentation and omitted to retrace the history of Teams. But it is the observations and experiences that we made during the early phases of our Movement that explain and justify what I would call the formative way of our Charter.

## Understanding the ideal of Christian marriage

The first objective of the Charter was to present the ideal of Christian marriage and to identify the means that will allow couples to acquire a better understanding of it. You will recall that, during the preceding years, I had understood that, to awake a generous spiritual life in married Christians, one had, first of all, to help them to discover the greatness of their vocation.

How does the Charter facilitate this discovery?

- by means of a *monthly study topic* on a subject of married and family spirituality. Your obligation to study this topic during the month, as husband and wife together, and then to send your reflections in writing to the couple that will lead the discussion at the monthly team meeting, offers several great advantages. In the first place, it leads you to study the subject in depth, to clarify your thoughts, to make a regular practice of helping one another, as husband and wife, to study your faith and finally, during the monthly meeting, to have an exchange of views all the more fruitful that it has been well prepared by the discussion leaders, thanks to your replies.
- *The residential retreat*, at least every other year [later amended to yearly], is another favourable way of progressing in one's understanding of the Christian life. I had already noticed it as early as 1939 when I preached my first residential retreat to couples. It is true that some retreat-givers consider that a retreat is not intended for this deepening of the riches of Christian teaching, but only for prayer, review of life and for making resolutions. For my part, I think that it must aim at all these objectives, at any rate when it is done for couples whose religious culture is in great need of enrichment.

## Providing the means to live out the ideal

But the aim of the Charter is not only to help couples to discover the greatness of the Christian faith. It must also provide the means for couples to live it out. "*Woe betides knowledge that does not lead to love*". The Charter therefore mentions a series of obligations whose purpose is to help couples to progress in the Christian life by inviting them to turn to God, to a priest, to fraternal mutual help, to the support of a framework.

## Seeking the help of God

I will first outline the many obligations that lead couples to seek the help of God<sup>3</sup>:

- *Conjugal and family prayer*: Christ, present in the couple through the sacrament of marriage, expects in the first place that those with whom he lives should unite with him in praising the Father.
- *Prayer at the monthly meeting*: placed immediately after the meal and before the exchange of views on the study topic, this extended prayer is the highlight of the meeting; it is the time you value most.
- *The antiphon to Our Lady* [now the Magnificat] that all members of Teams say every evening, brings invisibly together all couples of the Movement in Europe, Africa, America... to ask the One under whose patronage they have placed themselves, to help them to serve God ever more perfectly.
- It goes without saying that the *retreats*, presented above as a means of deepening religious knowledge, are also and above all a very special time of prayer.

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<sup>3</sup> *Daily quiet prayer* and *reading the Word of God regularly* were not introduced as 'obligations' until 1970. Prior to that, members were encouraged to include such practices in their Rule of Life

## Seeking the help of a priest

Having invited couples to seek first of all the help of God, the Teams offer them also the help of God's great gift to men and women to lead them to himself: *the priest*. The role of team chaplain is of capital importance in our Movement. To priests who come and ask me questions about this role, I take pleasure in showing them that our Movement – its organisation and various methods – is essentially an instrument placed in the hands of a priest to help them to fulfil better their mission of spiritual educators of couples.

## Mutual help

Another great help offered by Teams is mutual help: the spirit of mutual help, the obligations of mutual help between husband and wife, between couples, between teams. Mutual help is another word for charity. “*Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ*”, wrote St Paul to the Galatians (Ga 6: 2).

- *Mutual help between husband and wife*, said Pius XI in “*Casti Connubii*”, is one of the essential ends of marriage. It should be a daily practice. The obligation of a monthly dialogue between spouses that we call the “*Sit-down*” is to be considered from this perspective of spiritual mutual help. Husband and wife together, placing themselves in the presence of God, seek to discern his mind and will for their marriage so as to accomplish them better. Who knows the number of couples that owe their human and spiritual balance to the practice of the Sit-down? *Conjugal and family prayer, studying the study topic together*, these obligations already mentioned, are also means of mutual help between the spouses.
- *Mutual help between couples* is, in a way, the very reason for the existence of Teams. Remember the words of the Charter: “Because they know their weakness and the limits of their strength - if not of their goodwill - because they experience daily how difficult it is to live as Christians in a pagan world, and because they have unfailing faith in the power of fraternal mutual help, our couples have decided to form a team”. Every moment and activity of the monthly meeting are orientated towards this fraternal mutual help:
  - a) The *meal* and the ‘*pooling*’ of news during which we share our news, our joys, our sorrows, our failures and successes and during which we seek each other's help and advice;
  - b) The “*sharing*”, this painful and beneficial time during which we each report on how we have observed the obligations of the Charter.
  - c) The times of *prayer* and of *discussion* are also to be considered in the perspective of mutual help between couples.

But, as you know, mutual help cannot be limited to the ways we have just examined. It remains on the lookout for the needs of fellow team members. We all know couples that mutual help has saved materially and morally. A letter I have just received provides me with an example - that is also symbolic. A woman was between life and death after a dramatic delivery. She had lost a lot of blood and a transfusion was vital. All the members of her team offered their blood to save her.

- Finally, *Mutual help between teams*. Our Movement is a team of Teams. Thus, longer established teams help those that start at the other end of the world, by making them benefit from their experience. On the other hand, the whole Movement gains from the example of every team, of the apostolic dynamism of Brazilian teams, of brotherly love that made team members in Mauritius triumph over racial prejudices... The testimony, during a retreat, of a Belgian couple who

offered to God their little child that death had taken from them, gave peace to a Swiss couple who could not come to terms with a similar tragedy.

### **Strong framework and strict discipline**

Our contemporaries - who are inclined to be individualistic and independent-minded - see nothing but restrictions, shackles and imprisonment in any form of framework. Far from making apologies for these, Teams offer their *strong framework* and *strict discipline* as a highly valued help. They consist,

- first of all, in the *rule* and the commitment to observe it, made within two years of joining,
- *control* of the observance of the obligations of the Charter. I am not afraid to use the word ‘control’, but a control inspired by charity and exercised with the aim of fostering growth in charity.
- Finally, *leading couples* that, at every level, are guardians of the rule, of its correct interpretation and application.

### **Following the will of God**

At the end of this long list of the help the Charter offers you, I would like to mention a means of progressing that you highly esteem. You are asked to pause periodically and submit your life to the bright light of God’s will, in order to check loyally and generously how faithful you are to it and to make resolutions that will help you to respond better to it.

- At the level of the individual, this method finds its application in the obligation of the *Rule of Life*. The Charter, providing for couples of very different ages, cultures and spiritual formation, can only offer a minimum programme. For this reason, it specifies that each member is to establish for himself/herself a *rule of life* that specifies the obligations they feel they should impose on themselves in order to conform better to what the Lord expects from them.
- At the level of the couple, it is the famous *Sit-down* – I need not return to it.
- At the level of the team, it is the *Annual Review Meeting*, at which we ask ourselves, in all frankness and good will, what reforms we need to adopt, what step forward we need to consider for our team life to progress in prayer, study and brotherly love.

### **Consequences of introducing the Charter**

The above - presented at too great a length and yet too briefly - is the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady, the reason for its existence, its objectives and formative way. When I proposed it twelve years ago to the groups in the movement at the time, I had my apprehensions. Would it be understood and accepted? Would it provide a necessary solution to the crisis I mentioned above? In fact, a few groups, who found the idea of a rule repugnant, left us – not without sadness, however, for they were very attached to the spirit of the Movement. Nevertheless, many accepted it, not so much out of any enthusiasm for it than out of trust.

The passing years brought unhopd for confirmation that the Charter was worthwhile. We saw, and still see, very many couples joining Teams, precisely because they offer a rule in which they find strength and security. Does it mean that our ongoing movement does not contain its quota of laggards and grumblers? Even Moses had some among his followers and I am not Moses, and I am not leading you to a land flowing with milk and honey!

Need I say once more that the Charter is not an end in itself, something complete and self-sufficient? If someone demonstrates to you that one of its obligations or one of its



methods does not help most couples to progress in charity, it will be immediately removed or amended.

The Charter took three years (from 1947 to 1950) to be established. The Movement has now lived by it for 9 years and is the better for it. The fourth phase that remains for me to describe to you overlaps the phase of the Charter rather than follows it.

## **EXPANSION**

Following the promulgation of the Charter, Teams developed rapidly in France, Belgium and Switzerland. It is obvious that the Movement was the answer to many couples' aspirations; but would it leap over language frontiers and over the oceans? In fact, and independently of any publicity - for we are strongly averse to it - Teams have spread from year to year to the nineteen countries where they are now established [1959]: in 1950 to Brazil, in 1951 to Luxemburg, in 1952 to Flemish-speaking Belgium, in 1954 to Spain (teams by correspondence were established in that same year), in 1956 Portugal, Mauritius and [French-speaking] Canada, in 1957 Holland and Great Britain [French-speaking team in London], in 1958 Germany, Colombia and the United States.

This unexpected expansion seems clearly to prove that Christian couples' aspirations to join together to live out their faith better is one of those ground swells of which the history of the Church has given us so many examples. Only yesterday, I heard of such an example: one of our French couples, who had settled in California for a time, had spoken about retreats for married couples to people around them; twenty-five couples were willing to give it a try and came back full of enthusiasm from such a retreat. And since I am on the subject of America, I must not fail to mention the important movements for couples in Argentina, Uruguay and the United States. Based on an outlook that is rather different from ours, they are working admirably for the development of Christian married life. Valuable bonds of friendship have been forged between them and us.

### **A unified international leadership**

The upsurge of Teams of Our Lady beyond frontiers and oceans gave rise to a new problem. Should we create an independent national leadership in each country or contemplate a large movement with a unified leadership? This question was debated at length in the course of international meetings. Finally, we opted in favour of a single movement. This was not for convenience, since this solution lays heavy burdens on the Leading Team, but because it seemed to us that, if one is not constrained by overriding reasons, as applies to cultural, social or political organisations, one must aim at the greatest degree of unity. To do so is to respond to Christ's yearning that he revealed to us in his prayer on the evening of Maundy Thursday: "*That they may be one as we are one*". Besides, does not the example of the great religious orders prove that, in spirituality, there are no frontiers? You are joyfully experiencing this during these days we are spending in Rome.

It is in the name of this brotherhood of couples that we made a point of mixing nationalities in your teams of eight pilgrim couples. I know that wonderful friendships are already being forged. Is it not thrilling for Christian hearts to see all these couples holding hands across frontiers and oceans?

Having opted in favour of unity, it is essential that the Leading Team should be composed of priests and couples of different countries and that international gatherings should provide the opportunity to share experiences and discoveries. This will be brought about gradually and the necessary structures will be set up and perfected step by step. One of my

earnest wishes is that non-French priests should make their contributions to the Leading Team.

It is no less pressing that some couples, relinquishing their career, should devote themselves to the development and apostolic action of the Movement, at both the international and local level. Do not fail to offer these intentions to the great Apostle of the Nations at whose tomb we have chosen to meet for our major gatherings.

Need I add that, whilst being a supranational movement, the Teams of Our Lady fully intend to be subject to the Church hierarchy in each country and diocese?

## **TOWARDS THE FUTURE**

As you know only too well, children as they grow up present new problems. The same is true of our Movement. We must expect, therefore, some new phases and, hence also, new crises, since it is a law of life that, to progress to a new phase of growth, one must go through a critical period. Before concluding my conference, I would like to speak to you of early warning signs of a fairly imminent fifth phase.

### **The call to perfection**

After a few years in Teams, couples arrive at a crossroad. It often corresponds with the difficult phase when couples are in their forties, which does not make things any easier. They are faced with two paths: one ascending, one descending.

- Some, having gradually reached spiritual maturity, continue to make progress. They do not always analyse what is going on inside them. In fact, the call to perfection makes itself heard at the very heart of their conscience. They discern what loving God entails, its tremendous demands and wonderful generosity, and they ask the Movement to help them to respond to this call.
- Others show signs of sclerosis, of spiritual ageing, of that lukewarm-ness that the Fathers of the desert dreaded so much.
- There are some who write themselves off, like this team member who wrote to his team: *“I consider our religious life as being adequate; I do not see any imperative need to improve it. Besides, our progress through the team has not been very significant up to now and it has proved to be very difficult to achieve. The Movement, being highly idealistic, I must say that life’s struggle has led me to give up any idealism”*.
- There are others, on the other hand, who remain – I was going to say who become ‘encrusted’ into the Movement.
  - Either they observe the rule but – and this is serious - they think that it is enough and are satisfied with themselves. For them, the Charter is a ceiling, not a springboard. In their company, one cannot help thinking of the Pharisees.
  - Or they pick and choose among the obligations of the Charter, if not among the commandments of Christ.

A priest’s anxiety concerning such couples is great. It is like that of parents who discover one day that the mental development of their little boy or girl has stopped. It is one of the most heart-rending ordeals. These couples seem likewise to be stunted in their spiritual growth (I speak of couples, but sometimes it is only one of the spouses that is affected by this condition). The outlook is bleak for such couples for it is an inescapable law that he who does not progress, regresses. Indeed, how many failures we witness!

## **Nature of our Movement**

Faced with the aspirations of some and the tendency of others to let go (the minority, fortunately), I have a feeling that our older teams are at the same decisive crossroad as were those just before the introduction of the Charter. For a choice to come clear, to see the solution, we must consider attentively the nature of our Movement. Are Teams a movement of initiation to the Christian life in marriage or a movement striving for Christian perfection? Only the answer to this question can set us on the right track.

- If Teams are a movement of initiation to the Christian life, they must only retain couples as members for a time. To remain beyond a certain limit in a movement of initiation, makes no sense: it only encourages immaturity. One does not spend one's whole life in a process of initiation. We do not want our movement to be a nursery school of eternal infants, of spiritual weaklings or an association of spiritual pensioners.
- If, on the other hand, Teams are a movement striving for perfection, a "school of perfection", as religious orders were once called, then indeed couples can consider remaining members. But it is important that, having passed the stage of initiation, couples should set their sights on evangelical perfection, that they should take up their Cross, observe the demands of love and progress ever more forward towards total self-giving.

Movement of initiation, movement striving for perfection, which must we choose? My conviction is unhesitating: Teams must be both a movement of initiation and a movement striving for perfection.

- If Teams were only a movement striving for perfection, couples would hesitate to join; or, if they did join, they would hardly know what they were committing themselves to. One must have attained a certain level of spiritual progress to aspire to Christian perfection.
- If Teams were only a movement of Christian initiation, they would very soon disappoint couples that they had led to wish for more.

Theoretically, the solution is simple: after the years of initiation, couples would either leave or set foot on the upward path. In practice, the solution is less easy, but I am convinced that, in the months and years to come, a solution will be found. What is at stake is of capital importance and so I invite you to pray earnestly for this intention.

If I am definite in affirming that the Teams of Our Lady must be, not only a movement of initiation, but also a movement striving for Christian perfection, it is because, in my opinion, the Church has a pressing need today for such movements for married lay people. You know that humanity is growing at a staggering rate and that, according to demographic predictions, it will have doubled by the end of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century. You know also that priestly vocations – are not only not increasing at the same pace, but are often regressing. The cooperation of lay people in the Hierarchy's apostolate will be even more essential tomorrow than today.

But another, still more fundamental reason, leads me to think that movements of perfection for married lay people is a pressing need in the Church. It is that the holiness of Christ needs to be present today in all sectors of modern life. Our world has an imperative need of lay saints. By this I mean men and women totally dedicated to Christ, full of love, moved by his Spirit: workers, farmers, leaders of industry who are saints; artists and scientists who are saints, politicians who are saints – saints, missionaries and perhaps martyrs. We must not expect them to arise by spontaneous generation. Normally, they will only come from deeply Christian families; they will only be formed and supported by the kind of movements of perfection that I am speaking about.

I have in mind the great centuries of the history of the Church, such as the admirable 12<sup>th</sup> century in which Christian men and women of outstanding power have worked simultaneously to deepen and renew the Religious Life: Bruno of Cologne who founded the Carthusians, Bernard of Clairvaux, Cistercian Abbot, Norbert of Xanten who founded the Premontrenian Canons and Hildegard of Bingen. I convinced that, if we know how to pray, the Lord will cause men and women to arise who will do for the deepening and renewal of Christian married life what these giants have done for the Religious Life – men and women who will be founders of what I would call, for want of a better expression, great orders of married lay people within which will be formed those lay saints and apostles of which our world has such a pressing need.

What future might we not hope for the Church if Christ's shining message on marriage could reach the four corners of the world, if it attracted large numbers of young couples, if it inspired an ever greater number of families in which God was loved by all and above everything?

Henri Caffarel