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Le Père Caffarel

Henri Caffarel - La Vie en trois périodes

**Des Équipes Notre-Dame
à la Maison de Prière
1903 - 1996**



Colloque les 3 et 4 décembre 2010

Collège des Bernardins (Paris)

EDITORIAL

&

INTRODUCTION

Agnès Walch
Historian, Senior Lecturer



EDITORIAL

The Reason behind the Symposium

The “Amis du Père Caffarel” association not only supports the cause for canonization of Father Caffarel - his beatification is the first step - but also promotes a greater knowledge of the man and his work. To this end, they organized a scientific symposium that gathered together numerous researchers from different disciplines.

The diocese of Paris designated the “Collège des Bernardins” as a place dedicated to the hopes and questions of our society and its interaction with Christian wisdom. It was fitting therefore that the Caffarel symposium was held there on December 3-4, 2010.

Agnes Walch, historian and author of a thesis on *Conjugal Spirituality in French Catholicism, 16th-20th centuries*, presided the symposium. Father Paul-Dominique Marcovits, postulator for the cause of canonisation and Marie-Christine Genillon, vice-postulator, worked on the logistics as did Hervé de Corn, Vice-President of the Association’s Committee together with Monsignor François Fleischmann, ecclesiastical advisor.

The two days in December 2010 led to a better idea of Father Caffarel’s personality and his accomplishments in the ecclesiastical and cultural context of the time, from his ordination in 1930 through the years that saw the creation of the Teams of Our Lady, the publications: *The Wedding Ring, Journals on*

Private Prayer right up to the years he dedicated to the House of Prayer at Troussures at the end of his life.

The whole event was placed under the patronage of Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, archbishop of Paris.

The Acts of the symposium, gathered together and presented by Agnes Walch, with the help of Marie-Christine Genillon and Monsignor François Fleischmann, will be published in August 2011.

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual Conjugality: A multi-secular sensibility

When the first members of the Teams of Our Lady started out together they felt like they were pioneers experiencing an amazing moment in the history of the Church. Numerous accounts highlight the fact that those couples who set out alongside Father Caffarel were captivated by the novelty of the whole enterprise.

At that time, just before the Second World War, the Church's teachings on marriage were exclusively moral. As he explained in his 1959 treatise, "Vocation and Itinerary of the Teams of Our Lady," Father Caffarel received this reply from a couple disappointed at the conventionality of his remarks, "We talk to you of love and you reply family!". The discrepancy between the laity's expectations and the clergy's propositions was patently obvious. Henri Caffarel was no different from other clergy who emphasised rigorous morality. But his experience within various Church movements, JOC (Jeunesse ouvrière catholique) and Action Catholique for example, showed him that another way was possible: shared reflection. "*Let us think about it together, shall we?*" was his reply.

The Teams of Our Lady were built on this intuition that it was not so much about imposing a doctrine, in the name of the authority and superiority of the Church's teachings, as trying to set up a discussion and dialogue between

couples and the accompanying priest, who guaranteed the doctrinal orthodoxy. The Teams of Our Lady also promote couples' interpersonal relationships. And this was in response to the sociological and affective evolution of marriage, whereby marriage for love triumphed.

Father Caffarel's actions were innovative in these two areas, seeing married life through a personal perspective and associating lay people with the reflection. But did this mean that there was no tradition within the Church that could support him? No, because it can be argued that family and conjugal spirituality, terms given in the 20th century, was an older trend. And in order to understand this, Henri Caffarel's references need to be analysed, once the context in which the Teams of Our Lady were born at the end of the 1930s are examined. These references reveal a multi-secular sensibility that is far from being just the simple legitimisation of a newly created movement.

Father Louis de Raynal's Personal Account

of the Symposium



Last December, I attended the first symposium dedicated to the work and personality of Father Henri CAFFAREL. May I tell you what impressed me the most? As a diocesan priest, I was moved to see the amazing fertility of a priest's ministry in the service of couples and baptized people in general. The goal of his whole life was to help people fulfill their vocation and calling to holiness.

A man of his time

It was important to hear several speakers give the context in which Henri CAFFAREL was born, grew up and fulfilled his vocation. I noted the strong influence of *Action Catholique* (a Church movement) in his youth and at the beginning of his ministry. The fact that some people who had actually knew Father CAFFAREL quite well were present at the symposium brought home to me his humane qualities. He was a simple and discreet man, demanding but certainly impassioned. His marked taste for literature showed the importance he placed on intellectual life. Through writer's words, he celebrated the mystery of love. He encouraged couples to read in order to nourish their prayers and their commitment.

A life of Contemplation

Several speakers at the symposium highlighted the central place that Father CAFFAREL gave to contemplation and private prayer in Christian life. Indeed, was this not the secret of the fertility of his ministry? At the age of 20, Henri had a decisive meeting with the Lord. He was a man who slowly but surely was seized by God. He tried to encapsulate God's calls through prayer, encounters and events. Xavier LACROIX, one of the speakers, commented on contemplation "It is not a work or a thing to be accomplished, but a withdrawal

to be accomplished.” The prayers that spouses say together are their first missionary act.

Spiritual Conjugalit

Father Alain MATTHEUWS’ talk helped understand what is meant by a spiritual life, by underlining how much the action of the Holy Spirit takes place within humanity and therefore in a body. The ways of the Holy Spirit are to be found in the signs that we can see, hear and touch. This is an essential lead in order to deepen the spiritual conjugalit highlighted by Father CAFFAREL. Spouses, through all the acts of their family and married life, become themselves signs and therefore evangelizers. The couple’s mission is accomplished in the ecclesial body.

Universal Mission

The vocation for holiness is fulfilled in and through a couple’s love as spouses and as parents. There, indeed, is Good News! A Brazilian couple’s talk made me realize the catholicity or universality of the Teams of Our Lady movement that is able to gather together couples from different countries, cultures and diverse sensibilities. It was therefore very moving to hear this couple say ‘The good news about the sacrament of marriage must be brought to the edges of the world.’

In conclusion, what do I take away from this symposium? A tremendous hope for the Church! Since Father Henri CAFFAREL’s death in 1996, the small grain of wheat that fell on the ground continues to bear much fruit, by encouraging the sprouting of a solid Christian spirituality based on the sacraments of baptism and marriage in the heart and life of numerous people.

*Father Louis de Raynal is the author of a work in French published in 2010 entitled:
“The Good News about Marriage - Father Caffarel, Prophet of our time”
(« La bonne nouvelle du mariage – Le Père Caffarel prophète pour notre temps »)
- Ed. Echelle de Jacob.*

Information about
Two Talks from the Symposium

Monseignor Fleischmann



During this symposium, various talks led us to discover aspects of the life story and personality of Henry Caffarel that we did not suspect.

→ **Henry Caffarel's Family**
An Account by Michel Dealberti

Michel Dealberti is a distant cousin of Father Caffarel and he gave a presentation of the family environment that Father Caffarel grew up in. As a good lawyer would, he painted a very precise picture of the social milieu in which the young Henry evolved.

Both of Henry Caffarel's parents were born into Lyonnais families connected with the silk industry and the world of finance. Their ancestors had worked the land, but also were involved in the judiciary and notarial worlds.

Several of the family members lived close to the Cathedral of St John in Lyon and saw the basilica of Fourvière from their windows. The Caffarel family, and even more so the Voisin family (on Father Caffarel's mother's side) were both close to the Archbishops of Lyon. Several of the family members held positions of responsibility in professional associations as well as in civic ones too. Some played an important role in the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, in the Fourvière foundation, but also in the *Institut catholique de Lyon* or in a hospital, both financially and through their active presence. It is difficult to enumerate the priests and nuns from the different families, like the Thomasset and Venard, who were related to the Voisins and Caffarels. Several members of these families were present at the symposium.

In terms of religion, these families were faithful and rigorous in following a certain type of Jansenism that was common amongst the Catholic bourgeoisie

at that time. This was accompanied by true generosity. Father Caffarel's home environment was closely-knit. They enjoyed family reunions; they played music together; the grandparents were close to their grandchildren and the cousins remained in contact.

For those who only know Father Caffarel as the Parisian priest of the 1950s, the image depicted by this family environment is somewhat unexpected. Father Caffarel obviously received a lot from his family and remained ever faithful to them, but it would appear that he emancipated himself from them by coming to finish his religious training in Paris, where he became a diocesan priest. He also developed a wide literary culture while at the same time becoming very involved in ecclesial life in his early years, especially with *Action catholique* in the 1930s.

* * *

→ Father Caffarel and the Church in the 1930s

Father Gérard Pelletier, lecturer at the Faculty of Notre-Dame

Father Gérard Pelletier, a historian, was asked to speak about Father Caffarel's training and ministry before the beginnings of the Teams of Our Lady.

Father Caffarel spoke little about this part of his life and it took the perspicacity of the sensible and methodical historian to find his trace in the various circles that Father Caffarel moved in. The highly spiritual influence of Father Vladimir Ghika on the young Henri first of all in the Lyonnais region and then in Paris is to be noted. It was in Paris and with a view to being called to take Holy Orders that Father Ghika introduced Henri Caffarel to Father Verdier, soon to be archbishop of Paris.

At the same time, Father Ghika introduced Henri Caffarel to the Maritains at Meudon.

At the end of his training, the young priest was sent to the General Secretariat of *Action catholique* for the JOC (*Jeunesse ouvrière catholique*). This was at the enthusiastic beginnings of the JOC movement under the

leadership of Father Cardijn and Father Guérin. Father Pelletier reminded us of the aims of *Action catholique* as outlined by Pius XI. Father Caffarel very quickly became involved in running retreats, teaching and being a spiritual father.

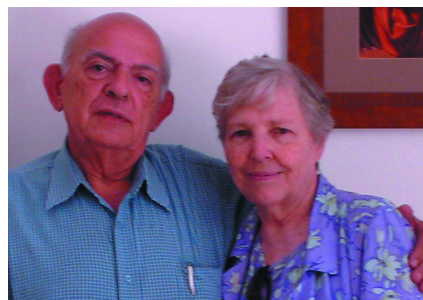
In the meantime, Father Caffarel also spent some years directing the *Centrale catholique du cinéma* and the magazine, *Choisir*, the press organ of this institution, as well as supervising religious radio programmes. These were tasks where Henri Caffarel, the cultivated and efficient man that he was, excelled.

He left this form of ministry and continued only as a preacher, until some young couples joined him in reflecting upon the spirituality of marriage.

Father Pelletier's precise and well-documented talk allowed us to obtain a clear picture of Father Caffarel as a young priest and to understand a period in the life of the French Church that already seems distant, but that was rich and fruitful.

Impressions on Claire Daudin' Talk

By Hélène et Peter Nadas - Brazil



“Father Caffarel and the Catholique literary currents in the 20th century “

By Claire Daudin, vice-président of the “Amitié Charles Pèguy” association

We would like to begin by saying that we were very impressed by all the talks and presentations at this symposium. We come from a country, it must be said, that is trying to make up for lost time on the cultural level and this symposium was a moment of tremendous revelation, not only about Father Caffarel, but also about all the researchers' work and intellectual activity that it gave rise to. Claire Daudin's talk was an excellent example of this.

We do not know how long it took Claire Daudin to prepare her talk, but the detail into which she went to made it truly superior. We understand that the knowledge of Catholic literary currents of the 20th century comes from her previous work, but her knowledge of Father Caffarel's works certainly was not acquired over night! Indeed, it would appear from what she said in her talk that she read practically everything he ever wrote!

We really appreciated the clarity of her presentation that was organized around three writers, who, in Mrs. Daudin's opinion, were of greatly importance to Father Caffarel. Firstly, amongst his 'companions in the catholic adventure' of the 1930s and 40s were Father Caffarel's constant citations from Charles Péguy's works. And amongst these were the surprising references to the anti-conformist positions of the poet. Indeed, this was one of the points of the symposium that changed our way of looking at the founder of the Teams of Our Lady movement. And today we believe, along with Claire Daudin, that possibly it was these readings that emancipated him—in his thinking and writings rather than in his personal attitudes—from the influence of the strict environment to which he belonged.

The second part of her talk also marked us, especially the fact that if the lack and even a certain disdain for the intellectual life exists in France, what can we say about a country which, like Brazil, lives and experiences so happily its ‘decapitated Christianity’. Everything that Claire Daudin gathered from Father Caffarel’s writings about the importance of study and religious training, especially what can be found to support our thinking in authors like François Mauriac, is very appropriate for our Brazilian Teams who, this year, have decided to emphasize training and learning as their central theme.

Finally, the parallel that Claire Daudin drew between love as it was understood by Father Caffarel and love as it was sung by Paul Claudel moved us enormously. Especially the reference to the ‘*Soulier de satin*’ (Satin Slipper) and to the love of its protagonists, who, going beyond conjugal love that they will never be able to give each other, give themselves to God who lives within them. In Father Caffarel’s opinion, this would be the very nature of conjugal love.

We cannot thank the organizers of the symposium and Claire Daudin in particular enough for the spiritual enrichment we received there.

Archives

Father Henri Caffarel :

SEARCHERS OF GOD



Amongst the various texts Father Caffarel wrote about couples, we have chosen this article that highlights the seeking out of God in the everyday acts of a Christian home. It appeared in March 1946, in 'The Golden Band, n° 7 (l'Anneau d'Or).

In this text, he invites us to become 'Searchers of God'

I do not know who wrote the following, 'For a long time now, religion has nothing more to do with God.' Just what observations inspired this thought are unclear to me, but I wonder if their author would change his mind if he stayed in a Christian home. What could he discover about the Christian God were he to participate in their prayer time, were he to observe the family's attitude during the Grace before meals, were he to see how his hosts lived? Would he feel a Presence? Before these Christians' sign of the cross, would he discover the grandeur, unknown to him, of a soul that adores? He senses a great mystery of love between the spouses, between the parents and children; would he guess that between God and the members of this home a similar mystery of love is present?

In this house, life is pure, honest, generous; but does this bear witness in the visitor's eyes to the holiness of God, or simply to honorable morals? Christ is mentioned and talked about here, it is true; the children prepare Baby Jesus' crib; but would one suspect, seeing them and listening to them, that the child in the crib is the powerful God through whom 'everything was made that was made'?

In a great number of Christian homes, only a very poor idea of God exists and this is born out by the formalism of the religious gestures, by casual attitudes in prayer, by the way of speaking to the Lord, by a life that is partly secularized. How far away we have moved from the frequently mentioned 'generation of those who seek the face of the God of Jacob'! (Ps 24,6)

It is important to act. It is imperative to form and train seekers or *searchers of God*. And, of course, this means making an effort. But in a world where men work so hard for many things, it is not fair that the Christian can agree with the author of Proverbs, who said :

'I tired myself out getting to know God' (Pr 30, 2)?

It is important that parents and children are curious about God and call out his divine name in the beautiful summer nights:

'Lord, you have set your glory in the heavens' (Ps 8, 2),
that they find him in creation, while they are walking in woods or fields :

'Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!' (Ps 8, 2)

Together with the great poem of the universe and Creation, should the Bible (Old and New Testament) not be the preferred reading in a Christian home that seeks the grandeur of the Eternal and the secrets of his Love? Over the centuries, the Bible has been the educator of the 'adorers in spirit and in truth', because it leads to the banks of the divine mystery, because the splendors of the All-Powerful are implicit in all its pages. He who reads it diligently and humbly becomes some one who is hungry for God.

'And who can be filled up with the glory of the Lord?' (Eccl 42, 25)

I like to imagine the home where parents and children live under the eye of the Eternal and they meditate his perfection in nature and in the Bible. A race of 'red blood celled Christians' are coming forth; the virtues in them answer to the divine perfection they admire just as a reflection answers to the sunray; adoration to the grandeur of the Creator; the child's trust to the Father's love; abandonment to his Providence; obedience to his command; praise to his glory. Harvests are not cultivated in the shadows, nor are the virtues.

Let us attend the moment of evening prayer in this home of adorers. One can see a marked preference for the grand theological prayers: 'Our Father who art in Heaven...', Glory to God in the highest and peace to His people on earth. We worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for Your glory...' 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of might; Heaven and Earth are full of your

glory.’ *‘Magnificat anima mea Dominum’*, ‘All the works of the Lord, bless the Lord’. (Dan 3, 57-88) Under this roof, the whole family uses the psalms to express their feelings to the Most-High and to pray in communion with the whole Church.

Let us observe the hosts of this house: adoration and love permeate everything, work, play, meals and sleep. No more profanities remain, everything is holy, everything is dedicated and consecrated to God as St Paul requested: ‘So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Cor 10, 31) And yet, it is not pressure or coercion, but the joyful freedom of the children of God that reigns in this family.

An enthusiasm for the glory of the Lord possesses these souls. This adoring home is an apostolic home. Is it not the spontaneous reaction of those who admire to sing their wonderment and to recruit for the choir of praise? How could they give up when faced with the ignorance of God’s love as manifested by their contemporaries and not share, with Our Lady and all the saints, the burning impatience of Christ for the manifestation of the Father’s glory?

The homes where God reigns prepare people to recognize his sovereignty.

Henri Caffarel

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