



Henri Caffarel, prophète pour notre temps
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At the end of this Colloquium, I would like to propose three reflection points that connect the Teams of Our Lady, Father Caffarel and Marriage.

The **first point** can perhaps be tied to the title that **Father Caffarel** has been given, a **prophet**. It is a question of **measuring how his intuition, his investment and his work to create the Teams of Our Lady were able to succeed primarily because they answered a need**. Since Father Caffarel's idea encountered the success that we now know, it is because it corresponded to a true need of Christian families. This need, as I understand it at a distance of 70 years, was how to enter as deeply and as truly as possible into the sacrament of marriage, not simply through a personal spiritual journey, but also through an ecclesial approach. A personal spiritual journey, because for many Christians who benefitted from Father Caffarel's initiative, it was a question of entering gradually into a greater understanding of the sacramental reality, not only concerning marriage, but also concerning all of the sacraments. **How to pass and move from the recognition of an inevitably one-off sacramental act**—the day the sacrament is celebrated is one day, before it is not, afterwards it is—**how to pass from this one-off experience to the discovery of what is at the heart of the sacrament**, meaning not simply a liturgical event, but **a grace for life**? How to pass from the one-off vision of baptism to a historic vision of the baptismal grace through the existence of baptised people? How to pass from marriage seen in the ceremony that previously frequently used to be closer to a formal blessing than to a spiritual event, in order to enter into a story of the sacramental grace of marriage through the story of the couple themselves? **How to pass from a concept—or from a practice if it was not theologically founded—from a one-off concept of the sacrament to a historical practice of the sacrament?** I believe that it is precisely this passage that was experienced almost a century ago, in particular from the time of Pius XI's encyclical *Casti Connubii*, that was a modern opportunity to take back the marriage sacrament through its content and not simply through the feast of its celebration.

The **second point** I would like to draw your attention to emerged very clearly in the testimonials that we heard. It is not only the discovery of the historical reality of the sacrament and the exploration as a couple of the historical meaning of the sacramental grace, but it is **the discovery that a sacrament is always ecclesial**, there is no such thing as a private sacrament. Yet this is paradoxical, because for a certain number of the sacraments, the people who receive them or who experience them are always individual people! Baptism is not given to a people, except in exceptional circumstances! A person is baptised. The problem is precisely in understanding that this act through which a person is baptised, does not concern just the person being baptised, but also the entire Church. Similarly, when a marriage is celebrated we do not celebrate marriage in general, it is the marriage of a couple that we celebrate, the marriage of this particular couple. You know that in theological reflection, we debate whether it is not simply the exchange of consent between the spouses that constitutes the sacrament. The question is, **how do we experience and live out the ecclesial dimension of this sacrament that is so eminently personal and particular?** This sacrament uniquely concerns two particular individuals and the others are merely witnesses. How do we not lock up the marriage sacrament in a private album of particular events that are of concern only to those who experienced it?



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The creation of the Teams of Our Lady corresponded also to this realisation that married life could not remain enclosed in the spouses' *tête-à-tête*, that it **was inseparably linked to the life of the Church** and **that this ecclesial life is expressed through the experience of life in the Teams of Our Lady**. What is one of the most intimate elements of the couple's life becomes the object of fraternal sharing in an ecclesial team. What is at the heart of the marriage sacrament becomes an ecclesial good through this sharing between couples.

The **third point** is the **change in environment** mentioned several times already. **How do societies like the one we live in and in which couples live, cope with different conceptions of marriage and family?** The risk, that we do not always manage to avoid, is to allow ourselves to be set up as the champions of a conjugal model. **Monogamous, definitive marriage open to the acceptance of children is not a ecclesial model**. It is not because Christians experience it as a sacrament, nor it is because they explore its treasures and that they try to share them, that they are entitled to a patented brand that would give them the right to demand respect for this conjugal model in the name of faith. This would expose them legitimately to be dismissed by a lay society that has no reason to support a model inspired by Christian faith. That Christian couples have the incomparable experience of the richness of marriage via their ecclesial and sacramental life is a treasure for them, and a treasure for others, it represents hope for all, but it is not an argument to claim that we possess the title deeds on this conjugal model. We have a testimony of relevance. We are called to bear witness to the value of this conjugal model, but we are also called to express ourselves concerning how this conjugal model corresponds to an anthropological expectation, that is to say, conditions for human love to be incarnate within a social institution that guarantees the individual commitment of the spouses. If we cannot manage to find ways to help understanding about why a monogamous, definitive marriage built with a view to raising children, is a model that corresponds to the human beings' needs, before being a need of Christians, if we do not manage to express how these marriage characteristics, that we recognise as being the sacrament's conditions, if we do not manage to express how these marriage characteristics are recognisable, admissible and beneficial in relation to human reason, even when it is not enlightened by faith, then we are failing in our apostolic mission. **Our experience of the Christian faith makes us precursors, prophets or great privileged witnesses, not to impose our customs on a society that does not want them, but to reveal to a society oblivious to the characteristics of the success of human love**. It is a considerable concern and challenge that probably was not as obvious and as easy to express 70 years ago as it is today, because social conformity meant that different models of conjugal life were less apparent.

To conclude, since we must recognise with grateful thanks Father Caffarel's prophetic role in the formulation of a conjugal spirituality in the 20th century, and since we must develop and deepen what he brought to the life of Christian families, we must also follow his example, by being attentive to the new conditions that young people face, to those who want to live a true and gratifying emotional life, and by demonstrating the richness of what the experience of Teams of Our Lady reveals to us and that ought to be highlighted as a light and hope for all.

Thank you.