



**Henri Caffarel, prophète pour notre temps**  
**Colloque International – 8 & 9 Décembre 2017**

**HENRI CAFFAREL, DIRECTOR OF THE MAGAZINE “L’ANNEAU D’OR”,  
AT THE HEART OF SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL CURRENTS OF HIS TIME**

**Mons. François Fleischmann**

The first issue of *L’Anneau d’Or* (Golden Ring) magazine in 1945 was presented as the initiative “of a few Parisian couples.” Three years later, the editorial staff recalled, “*Our first Anneau d’Or, and especially the second one, a special edition entitled, ‘The Mystery of Love,’ presented to a general audience all that we had studied, discussed, looked at in depth and all together for five years.*”

The editorial of the first issue was written by Henri Caffarel and was entitled *Loving*. Before the end of that first year, Father Caffarel was being called Director. That said, he took on the responsibility, but he did not constantly take centre stage. Members of the editorial committee appear in the magazine from n° 5 onwards; they included Father A-M Carré, a Dominican priest, who was to be an active supporter throughout the magazine’s long life, and the names of certain academics like Jacques Madaule or Roger Pons, and lesser known lay people. In fact, from the beginning, Father Caffarel was the sole director of the magazine throughout its twenty-three years of publication. He paid close attention to all the published documents. Undoubtedly, he was responsible for the whole of the magazine.

Cardinal Suhard, Archbishop of Paris, explicitly supported the magazine, as did his successor Cardinal Feltin. Incidentally, Father Caffarel’s diocesan mission was clearly that of “Director of *L’Anneau d’Or*” from 1945 onwards. Theological counsellors like Father Quince or Father Holstein, both Jesuits, as well as Father Carré helped too.

My talk aims at giving an idea of Father Caffarel’s work through the different parts that made up *L’Anneau d’Or*, a magazine that was quite original for its time. The idea behind the magazine was to give couples access to serious research on the sacrament of marriage as well as to married and family spirituality. It also proposed openness to other things, as we will see when looking at the magazine’s different types of input.

*L’Anneau d’Or* has often been considered to be the official mouthpiece of the Teams of Our Lady. Its relationship with the Teams of Our Lady is obvious, particularly since Father Caffarel, founder of the Movement, was also responsible for it. Therefore, until 1956, the magazine published the study topics suggested by the Teams of Our Lady. Their presence is often felt in the surveys or dialogue sections; articles also echoed the important events in the life of the Teams of Our Lady, like the pilgrimages to Rome or Lourdes; numerous articles printed the talks given at the gatherings of Responsible Couples of the Teams of Our Lady. In 1959, *L’Anneau d’Or* published an important talk that was given before thousands of couples in Rome, *The Vocation and Course of the Teams of Our Lady* (n° 87-88)<sup>1</sup>. The fact remains that the magazine was not the Movement’s official publication, inasmuch as that had an internal bulletin referred to as the *Monthly Letter*. *L’Anneau d’Or*’s distribution soon went beyond the limits of the Teams of Our Lady and was read in numerous countries in the world. Already in 1946, there were 7000 subscribers and 3000 sales per issue, and the publication of special editions sold even more copies.

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<sup>1</sup> References to the articles are given according to the magazine number and the year of publication. For literal citations, the page number is given.



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*L'Anneau d'Or's* fundamental ambition was well expressed retrospectively by Pierre Parrain, when he wrote about the first special edition, "*The Mystery of Love*". He recalled the "*fresh discovery of a doctrine [...] where negative moralism and traditional clichés had just been dusted off. [...] Love in all its dimensions was described in it: the flesh and the spirit, suffering and happiness, life and death, children and spouses, temporal development as much as eternal accomplishment. [...] All aspects of love are vigorously grafted onto Christ; grace appears from all over the place; even when it does not appear, the noise of its source is to be heard. Love comes from God and goes towards God...*" (n° 114, p. 472).

### **Theology and Spirituality**

In browsing through the entire collection of magazine issues, one is impressed by the number and quality of the authors of the articles. In the theological and pastoral areas, Father Caffarel managed to get numerous clergy or diocesan priest to collaborate. I will only mention the most well known. Father Carré, whom I already mentioned, often wrote throughout the years. Less present, but ever faithful, the future Cardinal Daniélou went from the Biblical domain to that of the Church's missions in that time. The Dominican Father Roguet shared his competence in the liturgical domain, while the Jesuit Father François Varillon gave a more spiritual note. Father de Lestapis, another Jesuit, brought his thoughts as a moralist. Biblicists, educators and many others were involved.

If the clergy are the most numerous contributors in terms of theological and spiritual reflection, *L'Anneau d'Or* benefited from significant contributions from the laity, who also embodied spiritual conjugality, based on their understanding and experience of marriage. Amongst these lay people who were more or less regularly present, Gustave Thibon, philosopher, Jacques Madaule, historian and literary critic, Pierre-Henri Simon, novelist and literary critic, Jean Onimus, literary critic may be cited. Sporadically, the magazine called on doctors, lawyers, and education specialists like Hélène Lubienska de Lenval. All this showed the diversity of the collaboration.

As examples, I would like to evoke two people who were particularly present alongside Father Caffarel.

No one is more active alongside Father Caffarel than Father Carré. He began by bringing together *Faith in God and Conjugal Faith, Happiness and Difficulties*, (n° 1, 1945). He developed a recurring topic: *Marriage, the Vocation of Holiness*, without forgetting the "suffering couples" (n° 2-3-4, 1945). He conducted a long analysis of couples' spirituality entitled *Like Christ and the Church* (n° 5, 6 & 7, 1945-1946), based on the famous passage from the Letter to the Ephesians. Later, he questioned the notion of happiness, made possible by God's grace, but also dependant on human freedom, because God "*will not keep love alive without [the spouses].*" (n° 15-16, 1947, p. 13) ; acceptance of the Cross is necessary. I am not going to go through Father Carré's thirty or so articles; these few evocations show the importance of his contribution, both theological and spiritual, close to the lives of couples. In the last issue, he was still present with *Couples before God*, an article showing that couples come from God, live their lives with God and journey towards God; Vatican II's influence is palpable (n° 138, 1967).

Roger Pons also needs to be mentioned. He was an academic, a professor of Literature, and a true support for Father Caffarel. He led an in-depth reflection on *the job of being a father* (n° 9-10, 1946), husband and educator, in a dialogue with children (n° 21-22, 1948), on the spiritual dynamism of the couple seeking unity and looking towards the future (n° 68, 1956). He bore witness too to the suffering of couples (n° 56, 1954), the obstacles on the road to the spouses' healthy spiritual balance (n° 27-28, 1949), on forms of despondency that ought to lead to hope (n° 65, 1955). Roger Pons contributed eighteen articles on spirituality and these few notes are simply to show the importance of the laity in the elaboration of



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conjugal spirituality, which was the primary aim of *L'Anneau d'Or*. (Roger Pons literary contribution will be discussed further on).

*L'Anneau d'Or* participated in a movement for distribution and deepening of the Bible amongst the faithful. It is significant that the first issue published an article by Father Daniélou, *The Bible in our Life*. Specialists were asked to write *Biblical Letters*, presenting a Biblical story or theme in a few pages. Citations were to be found at the end of the articles and sometimes they constituted a true Biblical record.

**Father Caffarel's Personal Editorial Contribution**

As director of the magazine, Father Caffarel also wrote a number of editorials (over 70) that were often noteworthy and gave rise to reader's reactions. His longer articles (about 50 or so) are the heart of *L'Anneau d'Or's* theme. Similar to and even more so than his colleagues, Father Caffarel followed a process that was not purely intellectual, for he touched the very life of couples as is shown by these few lines that end his text, *The Vocation of Love*. "A speech cannot not fittingly praise love, it is your life as Christian spouses who are involved in the magnificent adventure. People look at you and listen to you. Do not shirk away, for you have to bear witness. Christ's instructions also apply to your love: you will be My witnesses." (n° 2-3-4, 1945, p. 21). Members of the Teams of Our Lady will not be surprised to find, in issue n° 5, an editorial entitled, "An Unknown Obligation," where the famous "Sit-Down" was launched.

When he reflected on love, Father Caffarel saw that the gift of love that spouses give to each other converged with Christ's gift of love. "Being their daily bread for the person we love [...], bread, that most common and most necessary of things..., that is what Jesus Christ wanted to be for me. Give, until the last." (n° 27-28, 1949, p. 193). In the same special issue, *Christ and the Couple*, he wrote, "The aim of love consecrated by marriage is allow to flow in our hearts a bit of that divine charity that unites Christ to the Church. [...] When a husband loves his wife, 'just as Christ loved the Church,' [...] they achieve Redemption, they are united in the very love of Christ and the Church." This is an essential theme that he ceaselessly came back to, for example in the speech acclaimed at a meeting of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, "This mystery is great, in relationship to Christ and the Church." (n° 107, 1962). Father Caffarel's thinking on the sacrament of marriage is fully shown in two successive special issues, entirely written by himself: in 1963, "Marriage, that Great Sacrament" and in 1964, "Marriage, a Path towards God".

Father Caffarel was attentive to couples' lives and wrote on numerous spiritual and pastoral subjects. I will just list them here, since the titles are often very explicit: *The Vocation of the Father* (n° 9-10, 1946); *Disunited Couples* (n° 15-16, 1947); *Signs of the Times, Groups of Couples*, looking at other groups beyond the Teams of Our Lady, (n° 30, 1949); *What is the Engagement Period?* n° 93 (n° 104, 1962) -94, 1960); the hospitality of couples under the title of *Knock and the Door will be opened to you*, (n° 104, 1962); *The Lay Person as Bearer of the Word*, (n° 109, 1963). On several occasions, Father Caffarel gave reflections and his thoughts on priests. There was the topic, *Our Two Sacraments*, important for Teams of Our Lady (n° 60, 1954), but also an *Introduction to Knowledge of the Priest*, after an enquiry (n° 63-64, 1955). Nor can we ignore the attention he paid to the conditions and spiritual life of widows, *Love Stronger than Suffering*, (n° 137, 1966).

Father Caffarel willingly honoured the Virgin Mary, to whom he entrusted the patronage of the couples' movement. From the early years, he introduced couples to the Virgin of the Home, "All of the Virgin Mary's life, starting with the 'yes' of the Annunciation, was a continual ascension of love. Therefore, it is indeed in closeness to her that Christian couples will learn to proclaim for the first time, and then for all of their lives, the YES that is the soul of their love." (n° 2-3-4, 1945, p. 157). Later in 1954, a long meditation on Mary and her vocation appeared. "Her destiny was exceptional in that it linked the three aspects of a woman's



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*vocation, virginity, marriage and maternity, and carried them to an unsurpassed degree of perfection.”* (n° 57-58). Father Caffarel wrote a whole booklet, entitled *“Take Mary as your Wife”*, that constituted an original reflection on the mystery of Joseph and Mary’s marriage, and that became a preliminary study on Christian marriage and a beautiful chapter on consecrated life (n° 123-124, 1965).

Finally, there is an important chapter that Father Caffarel was engaged in, and that is his teachings on prayer. But he did not do it alone. In 1953, he signed a report on a study that had been conducted with thirty couples who were team leaders within the Teams of Our Lady, *When the Laity Discovers Prayer*. He cited the contributions of these lay people to a great extent, avoided a theoretical tone and instead evoked the practice of prayer with its difficulties and effects. When he read the study’s answers, he concluded, *“One is surprised [...] not only by their tone of conviction and truth, but also by their value as testimonies. They tell of the joy of these men and women who discovered prayer and they reveal it to us because it introduced them to an authentic spiritual maturity.”* (n° 50, 1953, p. 136). And this is the moment when Father Caffarel launched the *Cahiers sur l’oraison* (Booklets on Prayer). For him, *“our modern world awaits a surplus of soul”* that interior prayer ought to bring (n° 91, 1960). And as an essential element of conjugal spirituality, *the Christian couple* is called upon to be a *community of prayer*. (n° 98, 1961). Father Caffarel’s famous 17 *Lettres sur l’oraison* (Letters on Prayer) were first published in *L’Anneau d’Or* (n° 75-76) in 1957, and in 1967 a further 100 letters (n° 135-136), also a book, *“Cent Lettres sur la Prière”*.

### **The Sources**

It was not a scientific magazine, which does not take from its quality, indeed, there were complaints sporadically from some readers who found the intellectual level too high. Neither Father Caffarel nor the other authors tended to cite their sources and there were very few footnotes. Nonetheless, the sources exist and can be identified.

The special issue 51-52 of 1953 is specifically made up of a collection of theological texts on marriage, entitled *“The Mystery and Mystique of Marriage”*. The Introduction explained the title, *“The mystery means the experience of the mystery; the mystique of marriage means the voluntary communion of the spouses with Christ’s love. The mystery is objective...”* (p. 207)

When reading through this collection, we perceived therefore the sources that inspired *L’Anneau d’Or* and its director. The texts presented are *“on the one hand, articles and essays by contemporary Catholic theologians and writers, who present valuable research into the traditional doctrine [...], and on the other hand, pontifical texts that have defined the Church’s teachings.”* (p. 208)

The Director of *L’Anneau d’Or* was constantly concerned with pedagogy. The work is organised around 9 chapters, each one preceded by a one-page summary. In each section, various texts are to be found, preceded by introductions that *“very often bring precision, qualify, concern reservations, or add...”* (p. 209). The collection wanted to show the basis of *“our greatest preoccupations.”* It is worth citing the lines that express these convictions and justify the choices, *“A family is a unique community of its kind: we believe that at the heart of the family, the conjugal union rules everything, both the children’s education and the apostolic influence; we believe finally that human love experienced in the spirit of charity is a school of holiness.”*

It is important to highlight the influence of Matthias-Joseph Scheeben, whom *L’Anneau d’Or* introduced as *“a German theologian of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who inspired the majority of the current theological studies on marriage.”* (p. 224) Indeed, he provoked a true renewal in the way the sacrament of marriage was considered, moving it on from the moralising and contractual conception of marriage that



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was then accepted. Scheeben had written, “*Thus, it is less a question of the two spouses uniting and more a question of God who unites them to each other through the intermediary of their will.*” (p. 225) His intuitions were relayed by other German authors, who were translated in France. Thus, for the layperson, Norbert Rocholl, author of an important book on marriage, the latter “*cannot be reduced to an act of natural morality [...] The link with Christ’s marriage to his Church, that is the marvellous mystery of Christian marriage.*” (p. 247) According to the same author, “*the spouses’ union becomes an organic member of the grandiose and varied union of Christ with his Church.*” (p. 250) And in this we recognise a fundamental declaration ceaselessly repeated in *L’Anneau d’Or*.

The sources presented are organised in such a way as to present a synthesis of the magazine’s thinking from its beginnings. Each section is made up of diverse parts. In order to get an idea, let us look at the programme for Section IV, entitled, *From Love to Charity* (p. 268 à 276), that is introduced in these terms. “*Life is not a theory, nothing is given from the beginning, except seeds and promises. Conjugal grace, like baptismal grace, grows and flourishes...*” First text: extracts from Pius XI’s encyclical, *Casti connubii*. Then, a page by Dietrich von Hildebrand, a German lay person, opposite a page with the shared title; *Love, a Long Perseverance*, by Romano Guardini, a German priest. The notes highlight the difference in approach, where one author takes everything back to the source of love, while the other, more dynamic, calls for a long process of refinement. Then von Hildebrand returned to say “*It is Christ whom we love.*” Then under the title of *Weight of the Soul*, the same Father Carré says that spouses have a spiritual responsibility vis-à-vis their spouse and for Father de Baciocchi, a Marian priest, the spouse is *the minister of Christ’s love*. Finally, Rocholl is quoted to declare *Faith and Charity, Foundations of love*, and thus, “*charity, as a root and the mother of all virtues, produces all the required strength for the full exercising of conjugal life.*” (p. 276).

The subtitle of this collection is *Important Edition*. And indeed, it shows particularly well the intellectual and spiritual sources that deeply nourished *L’Anneau d’Or*.

### **Literature**

In reading *L’Anneau d’Or* magazines, one is struck by the frequent literary references, whether it be in the form of in-depth studies or in the reproduction of entire pages of very diverse works, or examples illustrating an article, or often fragments inserted at the bottom of the page between two articles. Overall, about two hundred and fifty literary quotes have been found.

But what literature are we talking about? There are the saints, young and old, who are in a minority; authors prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century who are very varied and if we take them in alphabetical order, we see that Fenelon is close to Flaubert, or Labiche to Lacordaire! And amongst the writers quoted, three quarters are more or less contemporary.

Why this attention to literature? Father Caffarel himself supplied the answer when he put together a special edition, a literary anthology entitled “*Love, where are you?*”. He explained in the introduction, that in contrast to “*marriage clinicians [...] the true novelist is in tune with his characters; he knows them; he understands them because he loves them [...] in this sense, he takes them as they are, and with all their complexity, and does not reduce them to pared down figures, schemas or “examples.”*” (n° 129-130, 1966, p. 179).

There is a type of literature that can indeed be called Christian, even if it is not necessarily edifying. Roger Pons, already quoted, studied Paul Claudel’s theatre plays in-depth, and Claudel is the most frequently cited author in *L’Anneau d’Or*. For in *Partage de Midi* (Shared Lunch), in “*this poem of ashes and blood,*” he admired, and also criticised, a conception of love that was both romantic and moralising. (n° 26, 1949).



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Pons saw the surpassing of love according to Claudel portrayed in the characters of *Le soulier de satin* (The Satin Slipper), "*The story of Don Rodrigo and Dona Prouheze enlightens the ways of divine pedagogy and the secrets of Redemption.*" (n° 49, p. 22). Claudel wanted to discover the spiritual signification of forbidden love and the true means for overcoming it..." (p. 24) "*For Don Rodrigo and Dona Prouheze forbidden love turned out to be the terrible and gradual learning process in sacrifice.*" (p. 28) And these are but two examples, but the magazine published many others studies based on literary works, either theatre or novels, always seeking a depiction of love, "...a love greater than a dream, stronger than passion, [...where one perceives] the sacred character, a willing discovery of mystery." (Pons, on *L'Échange* (L'Exchange), n° 67, p. 32).

Father Caffarel himself wrote about *Le soulier de satin*: "*Claudel knows that the absolute hunger that works in man's heart, and that creatures are quite incapable of satisfying, only God can fill. But creatures— and amongst them all, the woman for the man—bear a reflection of God and their divine vocation is the awakening in man's heart of this absolute hunger that is often dulled.*" (n° 129-130, 1966, p. 290).

Some not so orthodox authors too were called into service in *L'Anneau d'Or's* reflection on love. Thus, in analysing Jean Anouilh's *Le mythe de Médée* (The myth of Medea), Pierre Parrain wrote, "*Besides all psychology and all morality, she [Medea] stands before us like an almost metaphysical "myth" of human life and human love [...] avid for (and also empty of) the absolute.*" (n° 56, 1954, p. 107-108). In *Medea*, "*the marriage bond contains a solidity that survives treason, separation and all efforts against it. Medea endures and bears witness in her appalling martyrdom, that it is not possible for human power to break it...*" (p. 111) Anouilh gave vent to his pessimism, but as Parrain wrote, we know that if Evil exists, it is not the most powerful, "*thanks to Someone else, whose name is Love.*" (p. 113)

Many other analyses of the works of Péguy, Bernanos, and Mauriac could be evoked here... It is enough to highlight Father Caffarel's interest in this in-depth decoding of love.



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#### **Services to Families**

In September 1947, *L'Anneau d'Or* inaugurated two new sections:

*Throughout Christendom* responded to the preoccupation of “the role of the couple in the Church. [...] Important events in Christendom, even if they take place on the other side of the world, ought to find a deep resonance in the Christian family.” (n° 17, p. 46) There was information of what was taking place in Rome, but also on ecclesial life in France or elsewhere in the world.

The other section, *Family in Society*, was introduced like this, “We do not want a disembodied spirituality [...] This chronicle will henceforth bring information about society to our readers. It will show the place that institutions in France and elsewhere are making, or ought to make, for families and their members.” (n° 17, p. 49). The activities of the National Union of Family Associations were mentioned, for example.

These two sections appeared regularly until the years 1954-1956, then were dropped, maybe because the Director and his team considered that they no longer belonged to the heart of the magazine’s mission and that readers had other means of information at their disposal.

Another section appeared until towards the end of the magazine’s life and it was dedicated to *Shows*, cinema or sometimes theatre. Here the reviews were quite in-depth. For example, at the end of two harsh pages on the film, *Le diable au corps* (Devil in the Flesh) (1947), Father Carré’s initials were to be found. He had written that “our role is to provide the elements to enable moral judgment.” (n° 18, 1947, p. 65).

The *Books* section was more substantial, appearing regularly, and was complete with views of various other magazines until 1953. Numerous comparative analyses concerned, and sometimes harshly criticised, works in the areas of religious questions like learning about Scripture, liturgy, hagiography, love and marriage, social questions, history, education, and a few novels... Towards the end of each year, the section, entrusted to specialists, talked about children’s books. The authors of the analyses were very diverse, and that reflects the true wealth of the team that worked with Father Caffarel.

Thus, even though things evolved over the years, *L'Anneau d'Or* proposed a great variety of information to its readers, that was as much suggestions for meditation as calls to action.

#### **Childhood and Education**

From the very beginning, *L'Anneau d'Or* prided itself in being a *magazine for conjugal and family spirituality* and gave a significant place to anything to do with education. It was not a question of isolating educational measures. Pierre and Louise Bray saw parents’ spirituality as a fundamental qualification, “We must approach the Christian education of these little ones in a spirit of profound communion with the Holy Spirit. If we want to bring our children to Him, we must first be souls who are impoverished, silent, attentive to the Divine word and actions. This dependence will not only be sanctifying for us, but redemptive, because we will have the gestures and words of God towards our children.” (n° 2-3-4, 1945, p. 163).

The articles in this section were written by mothers, sometimes by members of the founding couples of the Teams of Our Lady and of the magazine, who were anxious “to prepare our children for an encounter with the Lord.” (n° 6, 1946). *The Gospel is the Rule for Education* (n° 7, 1946). We should also note this importance taken up in the *Books* section by analyses and reviews of works on education.

Various specialists in pedagogy and especially in catechism also contributed fairly frequently. In particular, the name of Marie Fargues, back then an authority in these areas, stands out. One of her articles was called *Our Children and the Meaning of God* (n° 54)



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We should also note that the role of the father was showcased... that of the mother seemed obvious. Roger Pons was the one who placed the father's role, beyond its psychology, on a spiritual level, *"For a Christian, the great adventure of paternity is a supernatural adventure. The job of being a father can only be properly conducted with the light and grace of the Father. [...] The father raises a song of blessing and gratitude to God; and through the father's hand, in turn God's blessing descends on the human family"* (n° 9-10, 1946, p. 32-33).

In the early years, emphasis was placed primarily on the children's spiritual life. Very early on, an enquiry was launched as to family prayer. From the 7<sup>th</sup> issue, (1946), the Gospel was suggested as a maxim of education. And we will see that a whole series of articles appeared on children's prayer and how to introduce them to the Bible. Families were oriented and informed on how to prepare children to encounter the Lord, for communion, confession and confirmation.

Over the years, articles appeared on education in general, to give parents reference points in terms of current problems, how to react to anger, jealousy and laziness. Thoughts too on fraternal love, and the awakening of conscience. The relationship with school and with movements like the Scouts was also discussed. In another area, the study on the Oedipus Complex in three issues is noteworthy (n° 30 to 32).

Of significance is the letter from a mother who wrote because she was disoriented by Anne Jacques' reservations on moral ideas and sin. An anonymous father answered her in a long and nuanced manner. These pages were entitled *A Complex or Sin?* And the final sentence is noteworthy, *"Mental equilibrium, as well as optimism, ought to be the golden rule of parents who are educators."* (n° 60, 1954, p. 512- 517).

In 1948, in a special issue, *"From Childhood to Marriage"*, the magazine dealt in an up-front manner with sexual education. Gérard and Madeleine D'Heilly presented a collection of works to help parents and concluded, *"In this area more than in any other, it is not only a question of instructing but of educating. We will render a mediocre service to our children in teaching them the laws of how life is transmitted, if we do not also give them at the same time an elevated idea of love, power of life and of purity, guardian of life."* (n° 21-22, p. 201).

Every so often the magazine returned to adolescence, trying to calm parents and help them to better understand the evolution of their children. Another centre of interest that appeared sometimes—and here we see that the readers have aged a bit—is the marriage of young people and the relationship of one generation with another.

Father Caffarel intervened rarely in a personal way and entrusted the education pages to his team. Nevertheless, towards Christmas 1952, he signed a scathing editorial, *Do you love your children?* He feared that for too many parents *"even with the better ones, their love, [...] was] terribly simplistic, crude, instinctive."* (n° 48, p. 410). Children need *"to understand Christ's call to them. Help them to become Christian adults who will respond to this call with the joyful gift of their young and hard won freedom..."* (p. 411). And the magazine announced that it would henceforth dedicate twenty-five pages to educational problems. This was a commitment that was generally kept—the publication's Director kept an eye on that—even if the magazine became a little slimmer from the end of the 1950s onwards.

### **Dialogue with the Readers**

From the beginning, *L'Anneau d'Or* had a confident relationship with its readers. That was to be seen in the *Dialogue* section, at the end of each magazine (except for the special issues). The readers were also called upon to answer surveys at least once a year; the questionnaire was followed by a report and sometimes even by several reports. Various testimonies provided a third means for the readers to give





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their feedback. About fifteen percent of the magazine's pages were given over to these regular stimulating exchanges.

The *Dialogue* section was inaugurated in issue n° 5, at the end of 1945. *In what ethos?* The readers were asked to collaborate. The Introduction makes this clear, "This dialogue will not be a game. [...]. *L'Anneau d'Or* wants to offer its readers true Christian thinking in all its purity, so that their lives can be enlightened; but the aim is also to define the real conditions of life of these couples [...] to introduce leaven into the heavy dough of daily life. What would be the point of putting leaven beside the kneading trough, of suggesting a mystique that had no connection with reality?" (p. 41). We cite letters received, containing approbation and/or criticism, after the first issues. Opinions differed on the balance between doctrine and testimonies, and the intellectual level. The editorial team concluded that it held the middle ground. The same debate would recur and with similar conclusions too over the years.

It is striking to see with what confidence some people gave testimonies about their spiritual searching or their ordeals. *Dialogue* was established on various subjects, and the editorial team gave answers to the printed letters, sometimes they were long, and, more than once, were clarifications or simply basic information. To take an example from the same issue, n° 5, the reactions to an article on Flesh and Spirit in Marriage generated the development of advice on conjugal chastity, a recalling of the law, and also an understanding of the difficulties encountered.

Let us list some of the themes present in the exchanges with readers.

Family life was often the subject of exchanges: a great survey on family prayer was to be found in several issues in 1945-1946; the same subject was taken up again in 1957 in an issue solely dedicated to prayer. Sunday, home, family traditions, the place of the Virgin Mary in the home were discussed definitively... The role of the father led to reflection, in particular on the part of widows, who testimonials were remarkable. Families' relationships with the priest came up more than once, included when it was a question of direction of conscience, and there, Father Carré issued some warnings! Questions raised by the wives' professional work can be glimpsed, although it would have been rather marginal in the magazine's readership.

A touchy subject was "suffering couples," suffering as much from disunity as from the death of a child or sickness. The Christian meaning of death was the subject of a survey in 1960.

To take an example, a letter was entitled, *An Enduring Fidelity*, and was the testimony of a wife and mother whose husband was unfaithful. She refused to divorce. The father returned for a time for their son's the wedding, then left again... The magazine did not add any comment (n° 138, 1967, p. 462-467).

Preoccupations with or happiness caused by the children returns very often, as an echo to the magazine's articles, as much from a spiritual point of view as from a general education one: prayer and preparation for the sacraments inspire parents' letters; one of Marie Fargues' articles provoked a survey on children and death.

For young people, the comments were about the engagement period and marriage preparation; at the time of *L'Anneau d'Or*, marriage preparation was just beginning, but it remained very irregular, as a survey on the clergy and marriage preparation showed (n° 12 et 17, 1946 et 1947).

With reference to the life of the Church, correspondents reacted to the very poor content of the liturgy for baptism or marriage and one can understand their expectations for liturgical reforms. A survey sought to find Christ's place in the home. The question of vocations, referred to as a *Burning Question*, was the subject of a survey and exchanges concerning both boys and girls.



**Henri Caffarel, prophète pour notre temps**  
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With the approach of Vatican II, the dialogue was a little different. Father Caffarel was himself involved in the preparatory phase, and was not going to remain insular. He rallied the Teams of our Lady and published in *L'Anneau d'Or* a questionnaire entitled *Couples and the Council* at the end of 1960 (n° 96). The consultation had been organised in terms of major questions within defined groups of couples in France and in other countries. Four thousand answers arrived and were analysed by over thirty couples. Since the outcome was unsatisfactory on certain points, a complementary consultation was organised involving two thousand other couples. The synthesis was published in a special issue (n° 105-106), in the spring of 1962, just before the first Council session. It is a huge file in three parts:

1. On marriage preparation and its liturgy;
2. On couples' lives, their spirituality and apostolic mission, couple movements, not forgetting the spirituality of widowhood;
3. On the pastoral aspect of marriage including the role of the Magisterium and the beginnings of a reflection on the morality of procreation.

The spokespeople synthesised the work and each chapter was presented by explaining the questionnaire, the answers were quoted within the framework of a well-organised presentation, and it ended with a brief note, entitled *Reflections and Perspectives*.

I have spent some time on this document because it shows the importance of the magazine's dialogue with its readership of couples, whether they were in the Teams of Our Lady or not: the magnitude of the answers is testimony to the trust that *L'Anneau d'Or* inspired under the impetus of its director. *L'Anneau d'Or* thus gave the floor to numerous lay people taking an active part in the great conciliar movement. The magazine expressed many expectations regarding the Council. For example, in the file on conjugal spirituality, where it was a question of couples searching for perfection or holiness, we read, "A whole series of elements need to be added, ones that "classical" spirituality had often dismissed, as if the problem of their annexation to spiritual life was too sensitive: love, the flesh, children, the world, money." (n°12 et 17, 1946 et 1947).

The survey that I have just accomplished on the collection of *L'Anneau d'Or* made me appreciate not only the quality of the reflection on marriage and the family, but also the editors' concern to be useful to spouses and families in the different aspects of their Christian life. It seems obvious to me that Father Henri Caffarel was personally responsible for it all.