



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

THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY

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Saint Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, spread Christ's message well beyond the borders of Israel. His journeys were divided up into three international voyages during which he created new communities of believers by spreading the Saviour's message and by forming budding Christian communities in the Holy Spirit of Jesus. In a similar manner, Father Caffarel, founder of the Teams of Our Lady, spread this new movement, in a personal manner, during successive trips to different countries within and outside the European continent, placing an emphasis on formation in the spirit of the Movement. Thus, as much as for Saint Paul as for Father Caffarel, the vision of evangelisation and expansion brought them to transcend frontiers and cultures by internationalising and strengthening Christianity and the Movement, as they created respective historical milestones in the distribution of Christ's message.

We are therefore going to give a short summary of the beginning of the Movement's internationalising process, in which our founder played a decisive role.

And so, if the birth of the Teams of Our Lady in France goes back to February 25th, 1939, nevertheless, the official beginnings of the Movement were in 1947, on the occasion of the promulgation of the founding Charter on December 8th of that year in the crypt of the Church of Saint Augustine, in Paris.

From the point of view of the influence of the people who disseminated the Movement in the different countries, it appears that the Movement's internationalising process developed over three successive periods. First period: countries that received Father Caffarel's direct influence. Second period: countries who received the influence of people who had personally known Father Caffarel. Third period: countries who received the influence of people who knew Father Caffarel only indirectly.

In this talk, we will refer to the first period of the Movement's internationalisation, through Father Caffarel's direct influence. In turn, this first period can be subdivided into 2 phases. Firstly, 1937-1946, prior to the promulgation of the Charter and secondly, 1947-1961, after the promulgation of the Charter.

First Period (1937-1946)

This first period began when, for the first time, four couples met in a Parisian apartment in answer to Father Caffarel's invitation, *"Let us seek together, (...) in order to better answer your call."*

From 1942 onwards, the Parisian groups began to spread out to the provinces. At that time, there were about a hundred or so couples, the majority in the provinces (Nantes, Troyes, Amiens) that made up approximately 15 Teams participating in short or trimestral retreats, talks and monthly meetings.

In 1945, the magazine *L'Anneau d'Or*, booklets on conjugal and family spirituality appeared, created by Father Caffarel as a complementary space within the Teams of Our Lady at the members' service, presenting their experiences and testimonies, an instrument in order to better understand "conjugal spirituality." This magazine, as we will see further on, exercised great influence over the expansion of the Movement beyond the French borders. On October 10th of that same year, Cardinal Suhard designated Father Caffarel as responsible for the groups of married couples and the magazine *L'Anneau d'Or*. In



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December of the same year, in the provinces, Teams were registered in Lyon, Dijon, Nantes, Reims, Rouen, Angers, Poitiers, Orleans, Amiens...

When Father Caffarel withdrew from the Teams of Our Lady, he summarised the evolution in France over this first decade:

“The period from 1937 to 1940, despite it being so short, was decisive. A generation of young couples found themselves irresistibly urged to question the Lord about the Christian treasures of love and marriage. They anticipated admirable discoveries to come. Two loves contributed to their energy, their joy and their reason to live: the love of Christ and their conjugal love. They aspired to answer the calls of both unreservedly—knowing full well, moreover, that the latter could only achieve its complete meaning and dynamism in the former.

From 1940 to 1945 what was later called conjugal and family spirituality was formulated. There was great enthusiasm to decipher the virtually unexplored territories of Christian spirituality and to experience these discoveries in a team, under the rule that we had given ourselves. The difficult living conditions, war, occupation, poverty, compelled them not to be satisfied with beautiful ideas but to adjust their lives to them.

From 1945 onwards, since the groups multiplied in France and beyond the borders, the Movement realised that it had a responsibility to the Church: what we discovered, and what we experienced, had to be shared with all Christian couples who aspired to fully live their marriage. L’Anneau d’Or founded in that same year of 1945 turned into a means of dissemination. We had great hope that a renewal of Christian couples would contribute to a new youth of the Church.”¹

Second Period (1947 – 1961)

On December 8th, 1947, the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady was promulgated in the crypt of the Church of St Augustine, Paris. In this same year, the Teams of Our Lady spilt over beyond the French borders to set up in Belgium and Switzerland (1947). In the following years, Brazil and Luxembourg followed (1950), Mauritius (1953), Spain and Canada (1955), England (1956), Portugal (1957), Germany and the United States (1958), Austria and Italy (1959), Australia and Columbia (1961) ...²

In January 1949, there were 32 Teams in the French capital, according to a survey conducted by the Direction of the Works of the Paris Archdiocese. Four years later, in December 1952, the number of Teams had reached 200 between France, Belgium and Switzerland. In January 1961, there were 883 Teams of Our Lady, spread over 23 countries.

The proliferation of teams was very fast. Couples were happy to tell their friends about the Movement; a movement that fulfilled their aspirations. The distribution of L’Anneau d’Or, the retreats for couples, which was something very new at the time, the invitations to friends by Team members, as well as professional trips abroad by certain Team members contributed in a large measure to the Movement’s expansion.

But it was not all a bed of roses, as Jean Allemant wrote: *“This expansion met with many obstacles. Incomprehension or hostility from certain bishops who did not authorise the Movement in their diocese.*

¹ Henri CAFFAREL, « A Dieu », *La Lettre Mensuelle des Equipes Notre-Dame*, mai-juin 1973.

² Jean et Annick ALLEMAND, « Aux sources des Équipes Notre-Dame », in Henri CAFFAREL, *Les Équipes Notre-Dame. Essor et mission des couples chrétiens*, Paris, Equipes Notre-Dame, 1988, p. 20.



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*One of them in France, said to a couple, 'Don't forget, you are merely tolerated!' The Belgian crisis in 1960 was a particularly acute symptom of this. Local opposition by Action Catholique and its priests... but there was support too. Cardinal Suhard for example, who released Father Caffarel so that he could look after the couples, that of Cardinal Feltin who approved the Teams in 1960 and without a doubt that of successive Popes.'*³

Cardinal Feltin, whilst approving the Movement's statutes, clearly referred to its international character: *"Their aim of spiritual formation justifies the ideal of the internationality of the Teams of Our Lady. Spiritual life does not have borders and this great spiritual and supranational fraternity of couples in a single movement, established in more than twenty countries, is a precious testimony of Christianity as well as a great hope."*⁴

Given the short amount of time before us, we will talk only about the Movement's expansion in the few countries where Father Caffarel's direct presence and influence were particularly outstanding.

Belgium

In December 1946, the Halkins, a couple from Tilff (near Liège), having been invited by the Poulencs to a team meeting in Paris, and excited by what they had just discovered, decided to make these groups known and promote their creation in their Belgium. In January 1946, they hosted Father Caffarel in their home and invited a few other couples over too.

In September 1947, Father Caffarel preached a first retreat for Belgian couples in the former abbey of Kortenberg. After this retreat, 4 couples (2 Belgian and 2 French) decided to create a Team in Brussels and this is how the first team in Belgium was born in November 1947.

At the beginning of 1948, there were 3 Teams in Belgium. After a retreat in April, two other Teams were created, one in Brussels and one in Waterloo.

In September of the same year, Father Caffarel preached a second retreat that was attended by 26 couples. At the end of this retreat, a Team was formed in Liège.

In October of the same year, Father Caffarel returned to Kortenberg, where he presided over a retreat, reserved for responsible couples. In January 1949, he agreed to preach a retreat in Brussels, but "on condition that at least 150 couples attend." More than 350 people came to hear him.

In May 1950, the first two Belgian Sectors were created: one based in Brussels and one in Liège.

In February 1952, the Brussels Sector already had 24 Teams.

In 1952, the first Flemish Team was created, Antwerp 1. In February 1956, Flemish Teams acquired from Paris the creation of a new organisational structure in the Movement: a Dutch 'Province,' experimental for three years.

In March 1960, the Paris Leading Team (Centre Directeur) "put an end to the failed three-year experiment of the 'Dutch Province.'" ...

³ Jean et Annick ALLEMAND, « Aux sources des Équipes Notre-Dame », in Henri CAFFAREL, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

⁴ Cardinal Maurice FELTIN, archevêque de Paris, Lettre d'approbation, 25 mars 1960 ; cf. « Le Cardinal Feltin nous écrit », *Lettre mensuelle des Equipes Notre-Dame*, n° XIII, juin 1960.



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The Crisis and its Outcome

The crisis exploded when the Belgium episcopate, in its annual assembly on July 25th, 1960, fixed conditions that *“in order to be authorised in our dioceses”* from then on should be fulfilled by every conjugal spirituality movement

1. *“Priests in our dioceses that are assigned to Teams as spiritual Counsellors will be nominated by us.*
2. *... the appointment of the managing teams of spirituality movements will only be effective with the agreement of a priest who represents the episcopal authority either on the national level or on the diocesan one, an agreement that normally will be awarded.*
3. *In the application of these principles, only teams of couples who fulfil these conditions can be accepted in our Belgian dioceses.”⁵*

In a private letter, dated September 15th, 1960, Father Caffarel wrote,

“A painful alternative faces us. Either we radically modify the structure of the Teams of Our Lady if we want to keep your teams within the Movement, or, if we do not think it necessary to make these changes, let all the couples in the Belgian Teams move away from us. Either they join an independent national movement or else they desist from joining any couple groups ... The fidelity to the spirit, to the methods, to the characteristics which from the beginning have contributed to the originality, the strength of expansion, the outreach of the Teams of Our Lady make it a duty for us to opt for the later.”⁶

In the end, a letter dated March 26th, 1962 from the Paris Leading Team (Centre Directeur) announced *“on this happy feast-day of the Annunciation,”* that an agreement had been reached between the Belgian episcopate and the Paris Leading Team of the Teams of Our Lady and that the activities in Belgium would resume as soon as the Spiritual Counsellors had been designated.

“Let us give thanks to Our Lady! And to the 400 members of the Teams who, in various countries, once a month, ensured an hour of nightly prayer ever since the day when, in view of the serious difficulties in Belgium, we institutionalised this nightly prayer.”⁷

On June 28th, 1962, the Paris Leading Team gathered together over a thousand team members in Brussels in order to start over again. Father Caffarel and the couples from the Paris Leading Team (Centre Directeur) presided the meeting that ended with a mass. The 166 Teams registered in October 1958 increased to 422 in 1967.

Already in 1959, when faced with the Movement’s great leap towards internationalisation, a new problem arose with the Movement’s international structure, one that the founder challenged in these terms:

“Would it be necessary to set up in each country an independent national management hierarchy or, else, a great Movement with a single management hierarchy? The question was thoroughly debated at the international gatherings and finally the formula of a single Movement was chosen. No, certainly not for convenience sake [...] It was a question of proceeding in the sense of the most perfect unity as a response to Jesus’ concern, ‘May they be one just as We are one.’”⁸

⁵ Teams of Our Lady Archives.

⁶ Teams of Our Lady Archives.

⁷ Teams of Our Lady Archives.

⁸ Henri CAFFAREL, « Vocation et itinéraire des Équipes Notre-Dame », conférence au pèlerinage des « Mille foyers à Rome », L’Anneau d’Or, n° 87-88, mai-août 1959.



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Brazil

The birth of Teams in Brazil had its own dynamic: in truth, they were not imported but rather were introduced at the express request of the Brazilians. Indeed, given his good knowledge of French, Pedro Moncau, was designated to contact Father Caffarel by letter, asking him for documented information on his proposals. Father Caffarel immediately replied,

“I cannot be happy merely sending you the documents; I also want to tell you how much your letter interested and touched me. To discover that, on the other side of the world, there are couples who have the same Christian ambitions and aspirations, who are making a similar effort, is tremendously comforting. It is wonderful to think that we can help them in their efforts.”⁹

Thus, began the fruitful correspondence between the Moncaus and Father Caffarel. The latter sent them documentation via Gérard d’Heilly, the first Liaison Couple. The documents were translated for the use of the first Team of Our Lady launched in Sao Paulo on May 13th, 1950 and was made up of five couples. And this is how Brazil became the first non-French-speaking country to belong to the Teams of Our Lady.

Father Caffarel’s first visit to Brazil occurred in July 1957. According to Pedro Moncau,

“It took place at Pentecost and only afterwards did we really understand the whole dimension of the Movement, all the requirements of its spirituality... The fruits of this visit were very important and visible. It had the gift of awakening a true missionary spirit in all those who attended the talks and enjoyed the hospitality. Moved by great enthusiasm and by a better knowledge of the Movement’s treasures, the couples left with the idea of creating Teams in all the places within their reach. From that moment onwards, the Movement’s expansion in Brazil was very strong...”¹⁰

At that time in 1957, Father Caffarel met with 13 Teams that had been formed. Five years later, in 1962, during his second visit, the number had climbed to 167 Teams. In 1972, for his third visit, he met 350 Teams.

Spain

The Teams of Our Lady arrived in Spain through Barcelona and, almost immediately, in Madrid, Seville, Valencia and Vigo.

In Barcelona, contact was made with Father Caffarel in June 1954, the Responsible Couple for Foreign Countries, Jean & Jacqueline Pillias, visited Barcelona for four days to talk about the Movement. In July of the same year, the piloting of Barcelona 1 began.

Pep Pereña and Manuel Niubo who had read *L’Anneau d’Or* magazine said to themselves,

“Why don’t we do the same thing here?” “And this is how we began, forming a group of Christian families that in a short time resulted in the first “Mother of God” Team in Barcelona, that later spread through Catalonia and throughout all of Spain.”¹¹

In Madrid in 1956, a group of couples got in contact with the Movement in Paris and with the help of Constantin and Geneviève Sipsom and documentation received from Barcelona began the auto-piloting of Madrid 1.

⁹ Nancy CAJADO MONCAU, *Equipes de Nossa Senhora no Brasil -Ensaio sobre seu histórico*, Nova Bandeira Produções Editoriais, Sao Paulo, 2000. p. 26.

¹⁰ Nancy CAJADO MONCAU, *op. cit.*, p.60.

¹¹ Jaime y Maria José BARRECHEGUREN-FERNÁNDEZ, *España-Historia Resumida*, document updated by Alvaro y Mercedes GÓMEZ-FERRER, Valencia, 26 february 2017, p. 1.



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In Seville in 1957, Juan Aragay Priades and his wife, from the Teams of Our Lady in Barcelona began to pilot from a distance, with little documentation and a few sporadic meetings, Seville 1.

While the piloting of Teams in Seville was taking place, piloting began in towns close by where friends of the Teams members in Seville were to be found, (Villafranca de los Barros, Vigo, Jaen, Jerez de la Frontera, Rio Tinto, Linares, Malaga, Cordoba, Huelva, Granada) and the piloting couples that were based in Seville, attended all the meetings.

In 1959, Responsible Couples Days were organised with Father Caffarel's help as well as that of the Sipsoms from the Paris Leading Team. In Madrid in 1960, a Session for Leaders was organised, the first in Spain, run by Father Caffarel with the help of couples from Spain, France and Portugal.

In Valencia, between 1957 and 1961, Father Santiago Martinez with the help of the Asens from Madrid piloted the first four teams from the Movement "For a Better World," founded in Rome by Father Lombardi, sj.

And so, the Movement began its rapid expansion throughout Spain. In less than five years, the Spanish Teams had been multiplied by six. In 1964-65, there were already 277 Teams spread over three regions. Barcelona (including North-Eastern Spain, from the Basque Country and Navarre), Centre (including North-Eastern Spain as far as Galicia) and the South (including Extremadura, Andalusia and Levante).

Portugal

An interesting thing about the beginning of the Teams of Our Lady in Portugal is the fact that they started almost simultaneously but independently in Lisbon and Porto.

And there is a nice commentary in a text by Louis and Marie d'Amonville:

*"In the month of March 1958, Constantin Sipsom and I spent a couple of days in Portugal to visit the teams. There we learnt a Portuguese saying: In Lisbon people have fun, in Porto they work, in Coimbra they study, in Braga they pray. Well, it is in the town where they work that the Teams of Our Lady began. There was one Team in Porto last year and two others in formation. But in the town where they have fun, that is where there are the most Teams."*¹²

In May 1955, the first two Teams in Lisbon were created almost simultaneously and in that same year, Father Caffarel visited Lisbon and fully supported the new Movement.

In Porto, the Teams were created in the different manner to Lisbon. In 1956, the first Team emerged out of a direct request for information from the Paris Secretariat. The piloting took place from a distance, from Paris. On November 7th, 1957, Porto 1 received a letter from the Paris Leading Team, telling them that *"they were accepted with open arms into the great family of the Teams of Our Lady."* Then on June 5th, 1958, Porto 2 was officially accepted into the Movement. And from that moment onwards, the Movement spread rapidly together with various apostolates.

In Coimbra in 1956, on the initiative of Brother Mario Branco, who already knew the Movement well, the first Team was formed. Shortly afterwards a second one formed and then many more, generally made up of people from the university. From the outset, the Movement was well accepted by the Bishop who fully supported it in his diocese.

¹² *As Equipas de Nossa Senhora em Portugal. Origens e Etapas*, Agora Publicações, 2005, p. 38.



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A Spiritual Counsellor wrote the following about the work accomplished in terms of deepening faith and conjugal spirituality.

“We owe a lot to Father Caffarel, who I was graced to know and to listen to in various places and diverse circumstances. His thoroughness, his discipline, his ability to reflect, his spirit of faith and prayer profoundly marked the Movement and in particular those who were lucky enough to talk and exchange with him. He made us perceive that his action, linked to that of the Responsible Team whom he accompanied, was a breath of new life that the Spirit of God was communicating to his Church.”¹³

Columbia

Everything began with Father Caffarel’s visit to Columbia in 1957, on his way back from his first visit to Brazil. He was formally invited by Father Rafael Sarmiento, National Director of Catholic Action, who, in the name of the Columbian episcopate had met him in his Paris office and had invited him to “*come to our country and scatter in it the seed of your admirable Movement...*” Father Caffarel answered, “*I accept and in the name of Jesus and Mary, we will throw the net on Columbian soil.*”¹⁴ The first meeting with Father Caffarel was held in a theatre in Bogota, a full house. Then, Father Caffarel met every evening for a week with some 15 couples in the house of Ignacio and Cecilia Carrizosa.

The fruit of this trip, that took place between July 19th and 30th, 1957, was the creation of two teams entrusted to Pierre and Geneviève Poulenc, as Liaison Couple. In a letter to Pierre Poulenc, dated July 23, 1957, Father Caffarel had this to say about his visit to Bogota:

“My Dear Pierre,

My trip is going as planned. It is possible that here in Columbia the Movement will become very big and important. Many couples, it appears, are ready for the Teams experience and Father Sarmiento, given his important post at the head of (Catholic Action in) Latin America, seems determined not only to support but indeed to actively develop it.

Every evening I meet up with the 15 couples. They will make up the 2 or rather 3 teams. [...] Thus, here too my trip seems to have been very providential. Now, I realise more than ever the considerable role that the Teams can play in very diverse Christian environments. It is certainly a great joy, but at the same time, makes me realise the immense responsibility that lies on our shoulders.”¹⁵

Cecilia and Ignacio Carrizosa wrote the following to the Leading Team on September 16th, 1957,

“Father Caffarel has made a great impression on us and has introduced us to a new life that, given its links of friendship with Christ, certainly will bear great fruit.”¹⁶

Contact continued between France and Columbia. In September 1961, Antoine de la Panouse and his wife Solange went on a business trip to Columbia. The Leading Team expressly requested that they contact the couples in the first teams. And so, they met with two teams: the first made up of 12 couples, some of whom had been there since the beginning; and the second with 8 couples created in May 1961. In their meeting with the first group of couples, they told them “*You must start again*” and offered to pilot the

¹³ Teams of Our Lady Archives.

¹⁴ *Equipos de Nuestra Señora. 50 años, Colombia, 1961 -2011.*

¹⁵ Teams of Our Lady Archives.

¹⁶ Teams of Our Lady Archives.



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Team. In January 1962, the Paris Leading Team informed the Movement of the official admission of Bogota 1.

Conclusion

We have only given a description of the beginning of the Movement in a few countries in this first period of the Movement's expansion. Briefly, we saw Father Caffarel's direct influence on the international development of the Teams of Our Lady Movement through his tireless activity that led him to visit fifteen countries spreading the good news of marriage. But on top of this expansion, Father Caffarel insisted on the fact that "**Growth can be a danger if in-depth formation does not accompany it.**"

He thus synchronised the spread of the Teams of Our Lady with an in-depth formation for newly created Teams concerning the Movement's charism, mystique and pedagogy. Furthermore, his conviction was that it would not be perceived as a human success, but rather as the fruit of the Holy Spirit's action. All this effort confirmed his conviction that "*It is better to have few Teams in a region, but Teams who are joyful, bearers of a clear message.*"

We do not want to conclude without asking, "What is the Movement's vocation in today's world"? Let it be Father Caffarel himself who answers this, going back to some of the words he said at the beginning of a series of talks given in Brazil in 1972, in which he stated that the Teams of Our Lady ought to be continually reinvented.

*"It is no longer a question of simply being a conservative movement that keeps faith in the Church, it is a question of begin a ferment of renewal, even a spiritual revolution. And if the Teams, in the days after the Council, are not this ferment of renewal in the Church, they will be marginalised and new movements more boldly revolutionary, I hope, will spring forth to work for the 'Modernisation' of the Church. [...] We want the Teams of Our Lady to be useful in the coming century. However, this means that they have to be rethought according to the Church that today needs them more than ever."*¹⁷

Thank you.

¹⁷ Father Caffarel's trip to Brazil, 1972, First Talk, Teams of Our Lady Archives.