



**FATIMA GATHERING**

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***Interviewed by Francoise and Remi Gausse***

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***Remi and Francoise Gausse: RFG***

***Jean Allemand : JA***

***Fr. Paul-Dominique Marcovits: PDM***

***Introduction: description and vocation***

***RFG:*** Jean, how do you perceive Father Caffarel?

***JA:*** I met him for the first time in 1968. It was 50 years ago. My first impression was all about his appearance: In front of me stood a short man, slim and strident, whose extremely lively eyes impressed me. Working together for a long time has enabled me to gradually grow closer to this man who was unassuming and even secretive. I discovered a man of God, in the real sense of the phrase, a man captured by God as I have called his biography. That is to say someone who has met God in Jesus Christ, who was dazzled by him, and who tries to bring all people to this same encounter. Besides, recently, he himself lifted a corner of this veil.



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**PDM:** Yes, recently, he lifted a corner of the veil covering his encounter with Christ. In fact Father Caffarel was over 70 years old when he confided this to a journalist who had come to interview him: the love of Christ was revealed to him. Let us listen to him: “ *March 1923. At the age of 20, Jesus became Somebody for me. Oh! Nothing spectacular. On this distant March day, I knew that I was loved and that I loved, and that from then on between him and me it would be for life; everything was at stake.*” (J. Allemand, Henri Caffarel, *A Man Captured by God*, p. 14) The unforgettable story of his vocation! God who is love, God lights up his whole life. To be loved by Christ! To love Christ! Later, Father Caffarel would write – when he described the great hope of his life: “ *The saints go a long way in love because, first of all, they go a long way to get acquainted. For Christ they have that passionate interest which lovers have for one another. They are curious about Him: through His words—I was going to say the inflexions of His voice -, His gestures as far as the Gospel tells us about them, they guess His Spirit. They seek him in prayer, ceaselessly, patiently. And throughout their whole lives. Probably they are only saints for having been constant listeners.*”

**RFG:** Jean, did Father Caffarel share other confidences on this subject?

**JA:** Only one other time, more fully, to a select group chosen by him, when he said his goodbyes to the Teams of Our Lady: “ *The beginnings of the Teams of Our Lady go back much further than these 35 years. It goes back 50 years. It was because, in the month of March 1923, exactly 50 years ago, one day I realised the existence of Christ, of the life of Christ, of the love of Christ, of the relationship of love between Christ and man in which the Christian life consists; that was for me the time of the parting of the waters. For me there is the “before this month” of March 1923, and there is “after this month” of March 1923. That left its mark on me, and since that day, I have had only one wish: for me to enter more closely into this intimate life with Christ, and another wish: to lead others to that point, because that has been fundamental in my life, that has given me the joy of living, the grace to live, the enthusiasm to live.*

*In addition, I cannot not wish for others this encounter with the living Christ, this discovery that God is Love.”* (Biography, p.15) We remain in the narrative of love. That was 25<sup>th</sup> March 1973. I was there. What an unforgettable memory!

## I. Human love



**RFG:** You have just described the person of Father Caffarel. Can you now talk about what he did for couples?

**PDM:** Father Caffarel spoke about the couple as the peak of creation. He showed the grandeur of human love. Of course, we can say that each person is an image of God, but in the book of Genesis (1,27), it is the couple: *“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, man and woman he created them.”* The God of love created man in relation with Him, after His likeness. The love that animates the whole being of God, the love that flows between the divine persons, becomes flesh in the love that flows between man and woman. As we all know, it takes time to realise the greatness of human love, inhabited by divine love, and couples have to take a long journey to receive this happiness from God.

**JA:** On this summit of the Lord’s creative activity, Father Caffarel wrote a beautiful poem in which he makes God speak. Here is a short extract:

*“God says: Christian couple, you are my pride and my hope. (...)*

*Human couple, my beloved creature, my privileged witness, do you understand why among all creatures you are dear to me, do you understand the huge hope that I place in you?*

*You are the bearer of my reputation, of my glory, for the universe you are the great reason to hope... because you are love.” (Henri Caffarel: Les Equipes Notre-Dame, pp.144-145)*

**PDM:** Following Father Caffarel’s magnificent poem, it’s also good to hear the liturgy of the sacrament of marriage: *“God has blessed the union of man and wife with the only blessing which was not taken away in punishment for original sin”* (Nuptial blessing No.2)

So the blessing of God for human love has never been removed. This is what is to be kept in our hearts, whatever happens: it is always possible to love each other. The spouses are always in the image and likeness of God. Sin damages



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love but does not destroy it, does not erase it. This is what allows couples to go through a lot of ordeals and, despite the difficulties, to reach a deeper and truer love.

*“There is no love without self-sacrifice; no self-sacrifice without love”, as Father Caffarel liked to repeat. Love’s powerful force does not die out easily; love resists many storms, especially when this love is upheld by the grace of marriage, by fidelity to prayer.*

That is the victory of God’s blessing. But this love that survives despite everything, is wounded: it needs to be saved.

## **II. The sacrament of marriage**

**RFG:** So who is going to rescue human love, which is wounded by sin?

**JA:** Christ is. This is the good news that he brings to human love: Not only does he rescue it, but also he transfigures it. In the sacrament, love recovers its original splendour but in addition it acquires a divine dimension. This man and this woman who give themselves to each other in the “I do” of marriage, belong to Christ through baptism, and Christ gives them one to the other. He implants into their human “I do” the flame of his divine “I do”. He infuses into the heart of their love the seed of charity (“agape” in Greek, which describes the love of the triune God). So, through the sacrament, every act of conjugal love becomes a channel of grace for the spouses. Christ embarks with them on the road of married life, which, we know, is not a long tranquil river: at any time they can run to Him in the name of their sacrament, to beg for light, help and forgiveness at a time of weakness.

**PDM:** It is also important to understand that the sacrament of marriage does not exist in isolation. It forms part of a living body of sacraments that is given to us in order to live with God: the sacrament of Baptism, which marks the beginning of the eternal life of love with God; the sacrament of the Eucharist



which nourishes us along the journey towards God and unites us with one another; Confirmation, the sacrament of the power of the Spirit in order to witness to His love. The two sacraments of reconciliation and the anointing of the sick, heal, restore, purify our life and our relationships with one another. Finally, Holy Orders and Marriage are the two sacraments that help towards the salvation of other people. *“Priests and couples have received the vocation of love.”* Says the prayer for the canonisation of Father Caffarel. As a priest, Father Caffarel used to say: *“Love is my being!”*

So he understood couples, and couples understood him.

### III. The Christian life of a couple

**RFG:** In founding the Teams of Our Lady, Father Caffarel wanted to help couples discover the riches of love and of the sacrament of marriage. But he also wanted to help them to live them. How? Isn't the Charter the method of helping couples in their everyday life?

**JA:** Certainly the Charter, published 70 years ago, gives a whole range of ways to help couples to make their way towards God. But first of all in the prologue it suggests a lofty aim that we should remember: *“They intend to carry out to the full the promises of their baptism. They want to live for Christ, with Christ, through Christ. They give themselves to him unreservedly. ( ... ) They acknowledge Him as leader and Lord of their home. They make his Gospel the charter of their family. They want their love, sanctified by the sacrament of marriage, to be a praise to God and a witness to people...”* (H. Caffarel: *Les END*, p.35). In this way, Father Caffarel strongly affirms the purpose of the Movement that he himself launched.

**PDM:** At the centre of Father Caffarel's life, God! At the centre of the Charter, God! Father Caffarel wants to share his passion for God. That is why he wrote the Charter in which every line – as we have just heard – exudes the powerful wish to receive the love of God and to share it among couples. The sacrament of marriage unites the spouses and it is the source of the support between couples in the team. Father Caffarel used to like to repeat: *“In the teams, people join for God, people stay there for God.”*



Allow me to add that we mustn't be afraid of the demanding nature of Father Caffarel. The demanding nature is for him a sign of confidence in the Teams, in the couples. In a letter addressed to Father Caffarel, Pedro Monceau who introduced the Teams to Brazil, refers to those who would like more flexibility in the demands of the Charter: we should simplify the study topics, for example,.... Pedro wrote: *“ Personally I'm not in favour. I think that a high ideal demands an effort. Besides, we join a team to help each other out. People complain to me that the effort must be proportional to each one's strength. And I answer that the team is there to multiply our strengths... The more so because, when we are in a team, we have the strength which comes to us from above and which will not fail us, if we know how to pray really humbly and deeply.”* This letter dates from 18<sup>th</sup> January 1951. A month later, on the 18<sup>th</sup> February, Father Caffarel answered him in the same tone, with nuances: *“ You are quite right to be demanding. Obviously we must not impose excessive and premature demands, but it is important that, from one meeting to another, from one year to another, we make progress. A team which doesn't go forwards goes backwards.”* Already, Father Caffarel, commenting on the Charter, was crying out: *“ What is important, is not the height which we should reach, but the enthusiasm.”*

**RFG:** Can you say more about the team and the couple?

**JA:** Again it's the prologue of the Charter which tells us: *“ Aware of their weakness ( ... ) and because they have an unshakeable faith in the power of fraternal mutual help. They have decided to form a team.”* (Henri Caffarel: END, p.36). Father Caffarel wanted each team to be a *“ success born of charity.”* Arousing the same admiration as the first Christian communities: *“ See how they love each other! “* He saw in the team meeting *“ a little Pentecost”*: the couples reunited in the Upper Room with Mary, seeking the coming of the Spirit of love. He emphasised the importance of the *“ sharing”* as a spiritual support.

**PDM:** Yes, Father Caffarel insisted on the *“ sharing”* as a spiritual support. The sharing: this moment of the meeting belongs particularly to Teams. It's a question of laying before the others the development of our relationship with God. This is about something very intimate.



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So the sharing is done with discretion and respect. Yet this exchange is essential: What we say in simple words, sometimes shyly, is always filled with the grace of God and in this way God unites the team couples deeply and in peace. For this exchange takes place in his presence.

So the sharing touches a fundamental aspect of our lives: for each one, there is a road to

travel along towards the sanctity of love. Seeing the others advance along this road, go forwards, backwards, sometimes straying from the path and taking it again with courage, all that helps us to discover God's mercy for each of us and for our team too. This is the way our team makes its way towards the sanctity of love. The sharing is, in a concrete way, a source of hope.

**RFG:** Father Caffarel was a master at prayer. The Charter recommends prayer at the team meeting, couple and family prayer. But at the start, prayer was only asked of the responsible couple, and during their time of service. When was it introduced into the Charter for all members of the team?

**JA:** It was at the time of the pilgrimage of the Teams to Rome in 1970. Let me mention a personal memory. One day in 1969 when I was working with Father Caffarel to prepare the Pope's address to this great gathering, I saw him suddenly appear in my office with unaccustomed impetuosity. "*Eureka!*" he said, "*I've found it*". We were coming out of the severe shock of 1968: the student revolt, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*....What had he found? "*I have reread*", he said, "*the whole history of the church. When there have been crises, people only got out of them by doubling the demands. How could I have founded a spiritual movement without placing at the heart of it, reading the word of God and prayer? We are going to take advantage of this pilgrimage by remedying the situation*". That's how these two concrete points of endeavour were introduced into the Charter.

**PDM:** Prayer, for Father Caffarel, was like breathing, the balance of his life.

When we talked to him about all he has accomplished, he replied: "*I really attribute everything to prayer.*" (Radio programme "Radioscopie"). At



Troussures, 80 kilometres from Paris, he founded a house of prayer where hundreds of people, priests, religious, bishops, parents with their children, young people came to learn to pray, to offer prayer which is the silent prayer flowing from the depths of our hearts.

**RFG:** Jean, did you see him praying?

**JA:** In the chapel, when he was on his knees before the Lord, helped by a small bench, he was fascinating: he was immersed in prayer, plunged into God. Silence! In Paris, in the Pleyel Hall, a huge crowd was there to listen to him. He demanded a long prayer, in silence! Nobody moved. God was there. From Father Caffarel there radiated the power of a man captured by God, filled with God.

**RFG:** Is it possible to describe Father Caffarel's personal prayer?

**PDM:** Your question might have remained unanswered, for prayer is a unique relationship between a person and God. However, Father Caffarel taught so much about interior prayer, that we can say that he prayed as a son: in the Spirit, through the Son, he prayed to the Father. As he often said, *“Christ prays within me.”* He prays to the Father. Let us listen to him: *“At the very beginning of prayer, make an act of faith in the mysterious presence of Christ in you. If Christ is living in you, He is praying in you. Because for Christ, to live is to pray. Join him: seize the moment; make His prayer your own. Or rather – for the expressions I have just used place too much stress on your own activity – let this prayer seize you, invade you, lift you up and draw you towards the Father. I don't promise you that you will notice it; I ask you to believe it and, during the prayer, give it to Him, to renew your full confidence in Him. Give him space, the whole space. That it may gain possession of every fibre of your being, as fire penetrates wood and makes it incandescent.”* (Being present before God, One hundred letters on prayer. No. 47)

**RFG:** For Father Caffarel, what was the aim of prayer?





**PDM:** The answer is easy! The aim of prayer is love! Let us remember the story he told us about his vocation: *“I knew that I was loved and that I loved.”* The aim of prayer is love!

That is why prayer is so important for members of Teams. By inner prayer, by the silence which comes down into the heart of the couple, the Lord places, installs, increases his divine love and makes it shine forth! Let us listen again to Father Caffarel talking to us about love:

*“Christ loves us just as we are, with our good side and our bad side, with our wretchedness and our virtues. We are looked upon with that look of love of which the Gospel speaks. It’s a great truth to speak about and to repeat: people are hungry and thirsty. They need to discover that they are loved because this love finds in them something lovable. Don’t they hear themselves say that there is nothing lovable in them? They don’t even love themselves; the great discovery, that’s it.”* (Radio Canada) Yes, the great discovery, there it is: we are loved by God... and we can love Him. Father Caffarel is a teacher for us.

### **Conclusion: Two passages from Father Caffarel**

**RFG:** We’re going to finish here. Would it be possible for each of you to read to us some passages from Father Caffarel that are especially dear to you?

**JA:** For me, these which link together love and prayer:

“How often does the love of spouses, the affection between parents and children go downhill, precisely because we neglect to maintain and deepen it? Our human love demands meetings, exchanges, heart-to-heart moments. It’s vital. So it is with the love of God. It fades away in the soul of the Christian who does not make some space every day for moments of meeting with his Lord, moments of exchange, of closeness, that is to say of prayer. It is no less vital.

**PDM:** These are the few words of Father Caffarel that touch me deeply. The title could be “Giving joy to God”.

“I have often noticed that prayer of intercession is a sure guide to judge the authenticity of a spiritual life: false mystics despise it, those who are true take



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pleasure in it. A saint is always a beggar, not necessarily knocking on men's' doors, but at God's door. (...): The truly spiritual person remembers his Master's phrase, which urges him or her to this prayer of intercession: "There is more joy in giving than in receiving."

In these words he discovers a secret in the heart of Christ, and it's more than an instruction, it's a confidence. And so it is this joy of giving that he hears you bring to his God making himself an intercessor in his presence." (Being present before God, A hundred letters on Prayer, No.18)