

THE PATH TO SPIRITUAL LIFE AS A COUPLE

Study theme



(Verso)

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PRESENTATION

This Study theme was requested by the ERI and produced by the Satellite Team “Conjugal Spirituality”¹, as a continuation of the experience lived during the XI International Gathering in Brasilia” “**Daring to live the Gospel**”.

Daring to live the Gospel today means staying anchored in the Word and in the love of Jesus which is revealed to us through men and women of our times. Daring to live the Gospel means not being afraid of entering into a deeper dimension of communion with the Father through our involvement with the story of humanity. Daring to live the Gospel means being certain that, if we stay near Jesus, our future will open itself up day by day.

Nevertheless, a study theme about “*The path to spiritual life as a couple*” runs the risk of creating false expectations and perhaps some ambiguity of comprehension.

Therefore, it is necessary in this presentation, to point out that this theme does not intend to provide an answer to the question: “*What is the spirituality of marriage?*”, for the simple reason that spirituality, like faith, cannot be defined by words because it is an experience that we must live day by day. We could study many books about faith and spirituality, we can do many good things in the name of our faith, we can be loyal practitioners of our religion, however, none of these things will be sufficient if we do not give spirituality the deep meaning of an intimate relationship of love with the person of Jesus, a strong relationship capable of transforming us into a reflection of this love for all those we meet.

“*On the following day as John stood there again with two of his disciples, Jesus passed, and John stared hard at him and said, ‘look, there is the lamb of God’. Hearing this, the two disciples followed Jesus. Jesus turned round, saw them following and said, ‘What are you looking for?’ They answered, ‘Rabbi,’ – which means Teacher – ‘where do you live?’*” (Jn1, 35-38)

So the first word of the historical Jesus is “*What are you looking for?*” Jesus made this request not to inform but to provoke a response that can make us aware from our own searching. Jesus, from the beginning, “encourages” us to reflect about our own way.

The history of God’s relationship with humanity is a history of questioning and searching because the essential quality of a Christian is “*quaerere Deum*”, which means searching for God. .

A theme about the spiritual life of the couple, is a full response to this continuous question of the Lord to us “*What are you looking for?*” All of us, willing to declare our faith in Christ, to realize our vocation to marriage from the perspective of conjugal

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spirituality, cannot forget that the Lord is expecting day by day our answer to his question “*What are you looking for?*”

We have been called, as individuals or as a couple, to be *always searchers of God*. Always: because a follower of Christ does not know everything, does not own everything, is not one that is already there, but rather one who is called every day to resume the search for God and to renew his love..

Certainly, it would be easier and more reassuring to already be possessed of the truth and to apply his “Decalogue”, especially in these confusing and complicated times and in the many days of personal and conjugal life where fatigue replaces serenity, loneliness replaces sharing, doubt replaces certainty, and darkness replaces light.

But the Lord did not give us a “Decalogue”, he simply invited us to: “***Come and see!***”

Benedict XVI stated that “*We should never tire of proposing anew this question, of starting all over again from God*”²

Therefore we must always start again from God, from the certainty of his presence alongside us, a presence that reveals itself in many different ways, because our daily life is where we can experience Him. .

This theme about conjugal spirituality is, therefore, a journey that we must undertake with the aim of awakening in us God’s question. With the realization that “*with respect to our personal (and conjugal) journey, starting again from God means that we must never take anything for granted in our journey of faith, we must never let ourselves be lulled into the illusion of knowing that which, on the contrary, is perpetually shrouded in mystery and implies a holy concern and searching*”³.

This is a study theme that helps us **dare to live the Gospel** because it repeats again today Jesus’ question: “*What are you looking for?*” And it is a response to the invitation of Fr. Caffarel, valid for all the team-members of all times: “***Let us seek together***”.

**Carlo and María Carla Volpini
(ERI Responsible Couple)**

² Benedict XVI, Speech to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 25 Nov 2011.

³ Carlo María MARTINI, Pastoral Letter “Ripartiamo da Dio”, year 1995/1996, n. 17

INTRODUCTION

Dear Team Members,

The spirituality of Teams of Our Lady is an extraordinary gift that God gave to the Church of our time. Conjugal spirituality is the main driver of that gift. For this reason, the ERI has seen fit to offer to all team members a deeper reflection on this subject.

The purpose of the study theme is to help us become aware of the basis of our faith and get a deeper understanding of the Church doctrine. The themes teach us to strengthen our beliefs and mainly to make them explicit in our married and family life. This is the way to prepare ourselves to give testimony to God's presence and love in our world today.

This topic is very special because its subject continues to be the backbone of our spirituality. Fr. Caffarel always stated that it is in simple things and the daily tasks enlightened by the Gospel that spirituality reveals itself on the great day.

*It is, therefore, based on this statement that we ask each team member to consider themselves as "co-author" of the study theme. Becoming "co-author" will imply assuming an active role in the methodology proposed. We want to ask you not to limit yourselves to receiving ideas and meditating on the texts. Our invitation is to enrich the theme with your own research and the testimonies of all the members of your team. This topic of Conjugal Spirituality will then become "**your**" own theme!*

First of all, it should be noted that if the focus of this study theme is conjugal spirituality, to get there it appears to us essential to take as a pedagogic approach a logical step that begins with the recognition of what John Paul II highlighted: "the desire and longing for God are seeded deep within the heart of man." This idea is developed in the first chapter: SEARCHING FOR A SPIRITUALITY.

In Chapter 2, we refer to THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY based on the union of the Christian to Christ's person, "this means that Christian spirituality evolves as and when the union with God and the level of intimacy with Christ progress».

Chapter 3 develops the concept of CONJUGALITY independently from a particular religious belief. Conjugalit is "the intimate partnership of life and love experienced by the married couple". Undoubtedly, conjugalit in a Christian couple has its origin in the love of God: "in the conviction that if man was created in the image and likeness of God, it means to live and love like Him"; when this love is present in the life of the spouses, this gives rise to a Christian conjugalit.

Only in Chapter 4 do we return to the specific theme of CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY as a completely new concept: it was especially enhanced and developed from the middle of the 20th Century on the initiative of Fr. Caffarel within the Teams of Our Lady Movement. Fr. Caffarel defines it as: "the art of living out Christian perfection as proposed by Christ in the Gospel in all true-life situations and in the various states of life of the Christian couple".



In Chapter 5 we speak of SPIRITUAL MATURITY saying that just like the stages leading to adulthood, spiritual maturity evolves and grows continuously with age and people's needs. This pathway then requires successive stages beginning with an initiation stage followed by another for improvement.

It is only in Chapter 6 that we approach THE MEANS OF CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY and not before, because first it is necessary to express and understand the meaning of conjugal spirituality and only then, analyze the means to develop it.

TEAMS OF OUR LADY, A SCHOOL OF CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY, is the topic of Chapter 7; in fact it was within Teams that Fr. Caffarel developed the subject of Conjugal Spirituality.

Finally, Conjugal Spirituality like all spirituality has its own requirements which are dealt with in chapter 8 entitled THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY.

In order to follow the methodology proposed, we list below the steps to take:

A- To prepare for the meeting

1. Answer some of the questions and question yourselves about your lives.

Before reading, studying and reflecting about the content of each chapter, take time to answer individually and as a couple the questions proposed. If you consider that there could be more appropriate questions, do not hesitate to ask and answer them.

Take note of the questions that challenge you and about which you would like to be involved during the discussion of the theme (without forgetting those topics on which you may require some clarification). Then prepare your remarks and comments and pass them on to those responsible for facilitating the meeting.

B- For the Team Meeting

2. Introduction

You will find here some explanatory guidelines about the subject of the chapter proposed for the meeting.

3. Becoming aware of reality

We present some tips to help you understand some specific parts of each meeting. It is highly desirable that you can complete these few general observations by making a special effort to research the signs of the times that most concern you. In this way your research may usefully assist you in your life as a couple and in your apostolic tasks. To help you in this research do not hesitate to use the texts from Scripture, quotes from books and media publications. A blank page is provided here to record your observations.

4 – Reflections

In each chapter we offer you some reflections sometimes relying on documents endorsed by the Church, the Movement and others, designed to clarify the subject matter presented.

5 – Texts to Study in Depth

The purpose of these texts is to enrich and deepen your reflection. However, others may be chosen. If you deem it useful, suggest them to the team other members of your team.

6 – Tips for Reflection

The same question appears in each meeting. It will allow you to help with formulating what enlightened or impressed you the most during your reading and discussion of the text as a couple. The other questions are suggested, but you may choose others that you consider more suitable.

7 – The Word of the Lord

Several texts from the Scriptures relating to the theme of the meeting are proposed in each chapter. During the preparatory meeting with the Spiritual Counselor, you may choose others, more suited to the needs of your team and the stage of its spiritual journey. This text will be taken as the meditation text for the team meeting.

8 – Suggestions to progress based on the themes proposed for each meeting.

Their purpose is to encourage couples to grow in their personal and conjugal spirituality so strengthening their sacrament of marriage by improving their Christian journey and preparing them for their mission of evangelization.

9 – Prayer

This is a prayer proposed for the team meeting. We invite couples to find another or even to compose one that would be better suited to their culture and aspirations.

The different aspects of conjugal spirituality are so rich that they cannot be contained within a study theme made up of eight meetings. Those who wish to deepen their knowledge will find at the end of this booklet a bibliography prepared by each Super-Region as well as the “Web Sites” where they can find reference documents for a more in depth study of the subject.

The testimonies of other couples have not been included here because it is more important that each team relies on the testimony of its own couples so that they will be able to show how each progresses in their Conjugal Spirituality and how they have overcome the difficulties encountered throughout the stages of their life.

It is evident that in each chapter you will find topics to nourish your “sit downs” that will help you to better adapt your personal “rules of life” to today’s realities.

NOTE: About translations to other languages, the Super-Region/Attached Region may assemble a bibliography in your own language.

CHAPTER 1

SEARCHING FOR A SPIRITUALITY



1. TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

- What does spirituality mean for you?
- How would you describe your spirituality?
- How do you live this spirituality?



2. INTRODUCTION

Our time is characterized by an uncontrolled individualism and is disoriented by a selfish materialism. Nobody cares about the environment of the planet and even less about others. It has created a great emptiness of spirituality. However, the latter has resurfaced as an urgent need, as a profound aspiration which lies at the heart of each man and woman (especially the youth) to seek to align their own spirit with the divine spirit.

It is very common today, to see how many bookstores offer a large assortment of books of different spiritualities. Most of those books invite the readers to become self-taught using the orientations and psychological and emotional techniques that will allow them to respond to the aspirations of their human nature. Nevertheless we can see that these treatises are drawn from the Asian religions and certain rites of ancient tribes. Often they are contrary to the Christian revelation.



Why do you carry all that, everything is in the Scripture!

There is nowadays a great fascination for these “alternatives” of spirituality. Many people, who only have little knowledge of the content of faith, falsely claim with relative ease that the Christian religion is not capable of inspiring a profound spirituality and then try to discover it elsewhere and fill themselves with other beliefs, whereas it is all found in the Gospel!



3. THE REALITY

Note: Here we ask you to do an exercise of discernment about the reality as you see and live it in your own country, your region, your parish, in other words there, where you live. Try to analyze with clarity your situation, try especially to formulate everything that, within the domain of the foundations of Christian spirituality, troubles you and/or fills you with hope

To begin this reflection, we offer a few points:

- We live in a world today that is experiencing an enormous crisis of spirituality and at the same time is living an awful withdrawal into itself. Yet, never has the plea for spirituality been so pressing and the desire to share it so burning among the young.
- Nowadays, the individual wants to take responsibility and shape themselves freely, hence a certain rejection of anything that might hinder this fundamental need. This rejection is multifaceted; it is mostly expressed by way of criticism, protests, and especially by the denial of various forms of authority: authority of the father, authority of the teachers, civil authority, and authority of institutions whether civil or religious.
- People who have little knowledge of the content of faith falsely claim that the Christian religion, because of its dogmas and prohibitions, presents an aspect of life that is either too idealistic or too negative to be able to create a positive, liberating and dynamic spirituality. In this context, temptation then becomes stronger for those people to “make for themselves” a new spirituality using other means and ways (New-Age⁴, Eastern philosophies and religions, esoteric, sects).
- Those who are outside the church often confuse faith and membership of an institution. We must recognize that this reasoning is equally found among many Christians.

⁴ New- Age. It is not a religious movement in the strict sense, nor a cult or a sect. It is rather a network of followers whose main characteristic is to think globally and act by immersing themselves in different cultures in fields as varied as music, films, seminars, workshops, retreats, therapies and other events and activities. It is a syncretistic movement, close enough to esoteric religions or occultism. It has taken elements borrowed from Christianity, philosophy, physical science, astronomy, modern psychology, Eastern religions and its own philosophy. It is therefore a dangerous movement. Certainly it is not harmless.

(We invite you to write here your own observations)

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4. REFLECTIONS

In his apostolic letter « Novo Millennio Ineunte », John Paul II has called our attention to the fact that other religions have been able to respond in a more attractive way to this current need. For this reason he invites us to give a testimony of life highlighting the value of Christ our savior.

Spirituality is not a theory that replaces the heart of a person. It is not a “spiritual technique” because it cannot be elaborated from elements found in different religions or beliefs. It is not a form of absorption of the human “self” in the divine “self”. **Spirituality is in fact a gift of God.**

As a result of the influence of “New Age” on contemporary culture, the Pontifical Councils for Culture and for Inter-religious Dialogue, published a study on this phenomenon. Although the document also mentions other religions, beliefs and spiritual movements, it invites Catholics to develop clear ideas about doctrine and Catholic spirituality so that they can properly evaluate the ideas proposed and the fundamentals of their thinking. Comparing the different spiritualities or mystiques proposed, the same document indicates that for Christians, life is a spiritual relationship with God. Through the gift of his grace, this life becomes progressively deeper and the journey also throws light on our relationship with others and with the universe. In this context, the only foundation of the Catholic Church is Jesus Christ who is at the heart of every Christian action and message.

What then is Catholic Spirituality?

It is a lifestyle inspired by the Gospel, which aims to follow Christ’s life as a model. The Gospel is therefore the cornerstone of Christian action. This is when we can truthfully say like the Apostle Paul: *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* (Gal. 2, 20)

We must clearly understand that it is faith in a God of Love that is the source of Christian spirituality. Faith is therefore not only membership of an institution. We do not believe because our faith is linked to the requirements and statements of those who lead the Church and because there are dogmas and commandments that we must obey to be saved

We became believers because we were deeply moved by the encounter with Jesus Christ. Because, seduced by the person of Christ, we feel the need to be enlightened, guided and assisted by Him, and also by our neighbor in whom Jesus reveals himself.

It is this relationship that allows us to change our way of life, to live our personal and married life to the full. It is from this dazzling experience (and it is a dazzling experience!) that Christian spirituality can emerge and above all flourish. Spirituality is not a “technique that we must assimilate observing certain rules or that we could “make” ourselves based on chosen elements”.

For Christians the basis of spirituality is found in Jesus Christ and in his message. It is the Word of the Lord that nourishes and guides all Christian actions. Spirituality is the response to the invitation to follow Jesus Christ in our daily life.

This daily life must remain embodied in our present life in the midst of other men and women.

It is therefore a spirituality that emphasizes love given and received, about protection of life, peace, justice, human rights, which are in fact all Christian values. It is a spirituality that builds a more humane person, to make the world more humane and more fraternal. We will explore all this in Chapter 2.

Love is the Christian identity. It is through this love that others will recognize that Christians are disciples of Jesus. It is through Him that we know the Spirit of the Lord, that others are encouraged to do good things and to practice justice. It is through Him that the monotony of daily life is overcome, that it becomes possible to find new directions of life in today’s world.

The route to spirituality, the search for an authentic spirituality, the maturing of Christian experience in these times of significant changes, is a way of growth that allows us to get in touch with our inner self, with our neighbor and with God.

This form of spirituality gives real meaning to life because Christian faith sees the person as an incomplete being, a being to become. It is a call to progress and to holiness that concerns all women and men. Again, we must understand what holiness is. As St. Francis of Assisi rightly said: « *holiness is not a self achievement, nor a fullness that we give ourselves. It is primarily a void that we accept and that God comes to fill to the extent that we open ourselves to his fullness. Our nothingness, if accepted, becomes the empty space where God can still create*”

If we want to become creative and attractive today, we must give God the space occupied by our selfishness and thirst for power.



5. TEXTS TO STUDY IN DEPTH

This is a short extract of the Encyclical *FIDES ET RATIO* (Faith and Reason – Chap. III, 24-25). It includes some ideas about the spirituality of this age.

Journeying in search of truth In the Acts of the Apostles, the Evangelist Luke tells of Paul's coming to Athens on one of his missionary journeys. The city of philosophers was full of statues of various idols. One altar in particular caught his eye, and he took this as a convenient starting-point to establish a common base for the proclamation of the kerygma⁵: "Athenians," he said, "I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god'. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:22-23). From this starting-point, Saint Paul speaks of God as Creator, as the One who transcends all things and gives life to all. He then continues his speech in these terms: "From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27).

The Apostle accentuates a truth which the Church has always treasured: in the far reaches of the human heart there is a seed of desire and nostalgia for God. The Liturgy of Good Friday recalls this powerfully when, in praying for those who do not believe, we say: "Almighty and eternal God, you created mankind so that all might long to find you and have peace when you are found". There is therefore a path which the human being may choose to take, a path which begins with reason's capacity to rise beyond what is contingent and set out towards the infinite.

In different ways and at different times, men and women have shown that they can articulate this intimate desire of theirs. Through literature, music, painting, sculpture, architecture and every other work of their creative intelligence they have declared the urgency of their quest. In a special way philosophy has made this search its own and, with its specific tools and scholarly methods, has articulated this universal human desire.

"All human beings desire to know" and truth is the proper object of this desire. Everyday life shows how concerned each of us is to discover for ourselves, beyond mere opinions, how things really are. Within visible creation, man is the only creature who not only is capable of knowing but who knows that he knows, and is therefore interested in the real truth of what he perceives. People cannot be genuinely indifferent to the question of whether what they know is true or not. If they discover that it is false, they reject it; but if they can establish its truth, they feel themselves rewarded. It is this that Saint Augustine teaches when he writes: "I have met many who wanted to deceive, but none who wanted to be deceived". It is rightly claimed that persons have reached adulthood when they can distinguish independently between truth and falsehood, making up their own minds about the objective reality of things. This is what has driven so many enquiries, especially in the scientific field, which in recent centuries have produced important results, leading to genuine progress for all humanity.

No less important than research in the theoretical field is research in the practical field—by which I mean the search for truth which looks to the good which is to be

⁵ Kerygma : first announcement

performed. In acting ethically, according to a free and rightly tuned will, the human person sets foot upon the path to happiness and moves towards perfection. Here too it is a question of truth. It is this conviction which I stressed in my Encyclical Letter Veritatis Splendor: “There is no morality without freedom... Although each individual has a right to be respected in his own journey in search of the truth, there exists a prior moral obligation, and a grave one at that, to seek the truth and to adhere to it once it is known”.

It is essential, therefore, that the values chosen and pursued in one's life be true, because only true values can lead people to realize themselves fully, allowing them to be true to their nature. The truth of these values is to be found not by turning in on oneself but by opening oneself to apprehend that truth even at levels which transcend the person. This is an essential condition for us to become ourselves and to grow as mature, adult persons.



6. TIPS FOR REFLECTION

- What has challenged you the most in this chapter?
- How do the values of the Gospel guide your spirituality?
- After reflecting on the theme, now describe what you understand by spirituality (see the questions at the beginning of this chapter, point 1.)



7. WORD OF THE LORD

With the help of your Spiritual Counselor, choose the reading to study for this chapter that best suits your team. You can also choose a different text:

Ac 17, 22 – 31

Rm 1, 16 – 17

1Co 9, 25 – 27

Ga 1, 6 – 107



8. SUGGESTIONS FOR GROWTH IN SPIRITUALITY

It is not man who comes to God. It is God who comes to man to transform him. We are in this world to transform it.

- Will the decisions that we make help us to build better living conditions for others, improve our family, create a better society, promote a healthier workplace? What should we change?
- Do we find our Christian behavior effective in the world today? Are we afraid to express ourselves as Catholics?



9. FINAL PRAYER

Each team can choose a different prayer, or song, or else a personal prayer made by the host couple or by another couple.

Psalm 66 (67)

May God have pity on us and bless us;
May he let his face shine upon us.

So may your way be known upon earth;
among all nations, your salvation.

May the peoples praise you, O God;
May all the peoples praise you!

May the nations be glad and exult
because you rule the peoples in equity:
the nations on the earth you guide.

May the peoples praise you, O God;
May all peoples praise you!

The earth has yielded its fruits;
God, our God, has blessed us.

May God bless us,
and may all the ends of the earth fear him!

CHAPTER 2

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY



1. TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

- What is holiness for you?
- Are you afraid to be holy today?
- If yes, explain why



2. INTRODUCTION

The Holy Scripture is the source of the Christian spirituality on which the teachings of the Church and the liturgy are based. The Gospel is then the cornerstone of Christian spirituality. Fr. Caffarel said that we must not be mistaken in the interpretation of the word "spirituality". For him *"Spirituality is the science that deals with Christian life and the paths that lead to its full potential."*

By analyzing some reactions of couples regarding this definition, Father perceived a great misunderstanding. Some couples considered Christian spirituality to be a kind of hobby, or even a science of prayer and virtue. Our founder explained: *"A Christian life should be seen as a whole. It is not only worship, asceticism⁶ and inner life. It is also serving God wherever he wants; the family, at work, in the city.⁷"*

The spiritual evolution of Christians cannot remain passive. On the contrary, it must be essentially dynamic because it responds to the will of a loving God who calls all of us to come to the fullness of life, irrespective of age. This means that Christian spirituality evolves at the same pace that our union with God and the level of intimacy with Christ progresses. This progress is based on personal growth, psyche and everything related to the educational environment, particularly the family, school and church.

Christian spirituality, therefore, is not limited to a fragmented knowledge of the mystery of God and the person of Christ. This knowledge can only be gradual because, fundamentally, it is a dynamic adherence of the person to this mystery of faith.

⁶ Asceticism: from the Greek word simply meaning « exercise ». To practice asceticism means exercising to get spiritual muscles in order to travel more easily along the path of Good. Asceticism cannot be justified if it is practiced for « love » « in order to » and « for the benefit of ». When performed solely for personal gain and not for the good of others, it deviates dangerously, it is emptied of its meaning, it becomes unnecessary, suspect and cannot be recommended. Asceticism can also be defined as a purification of the soul by a renunciation of external goods.

⁷ CAFFAREL, Henri. « UN MOT SUSPECT ». Lettre Mensuelle Des Équipes Notre-Dame. III^e Année, n° 8 - Juin 1950.



3. THE REALITY

Note: Here we ask you to do an exercise of discernment about the reality as you see and live it in your own country, your region, your parish, in other words there, where you live. Try to analyze with clarity your situation, try especially to formulate everything that, within the domain of the foundations of Christian spirituality, troubles you and/or fills you with hope. To begin this reflection we offer a few points:

- For many centuries religion led people's behavior. However, today things have changed radically. Modern society, by subscribing to the general movement for rationalization of the world, has committed to demystifying it, therefore repressing religion, since it is a proposal according to which the world would be commanded by God. The dominant culture of our Western world still believes that it is possible to master all things by forecasting. Nevertheless, as it progresses, science has started to perceive its limitations.

"It has realized that beyond that which is accessible to its instruments of measurement, there is a "veiled reality" to which it does not have direct access. Science is now aware that it cannot know everything. Science and spirituality are two windows that allow us to comprehend reality." (Trinh Xuan Thuau).

- Only a profound faith, based on the knowledge of the person of Christ, is capable, incarnated in the daily life, to reflect His love in our relationships with others. It is only with a personal conviction of the active role of Christians in the history of mankind, that it will be possible to overcome the crisis of faith lived in today's world. There is a close relationship between "reason and faith", necessary to face the challenge presented to believers today.
- In this context, what will be the future for religion? What will be the reason to talk about spirituality, and even more so, conjugal spirituality?

(Write your observations)

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4. REFLECTIONS

This a short extract from the Encyclical Veritatis Splendor (Ch. 1, 6-8), regarding fundamental questions about the moral teachings of the Church. In this document, you will notice that what is essential in Christian spirituality is to follow Jesus, to join his person sharing his “life project” and participating in his Father’s will.

"Someone came to him..." (Mt 19:16)

The dialogue of Jesus with the rich young man, related in the nineteenth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel, can serve as a useful guide for listening once more in a lively and direct way to his moral teaching [...]

"Then someone came to him...". In the young man, whom Matthew's Gospel does not name, we can recognize every person who, consciously or not, approaches Christ the Redeemer of man and questions him about morality. For the young man, the question is not so much about rules to be followed, but about the full meaning of life. This is in fact the aspiration at the heart of every human decision and action, the quiet searching and interior prompting which sets freedom in motion. This question is ultimately an appeal to the absolute Good which attracts us and beckons us; it is the echo of a call from God who is the origin and goal of man's life. Precisely in this perspective the Second Vatican Council called for a renewal of moral theology, so that its teaching would display the lofty vocation which the faithful have received in Christ,¹⁴ the only response fully capable of satisfying the desire of the human heart.

In order to make this "encounter" with Christ possible, God willed his Church. Indeed, the Church "wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life".

"Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt 19:16)

The question which the rich young man puts to Jesus of Nazareth is one which rises from the depths of his heart. It is an essential and unavoidable question for the life of every man, for it is about the moral good which must be done, and about eternal life. The young man senses that there is a connection between moral good and the fulfilment of his own destiny. He is a devout Israelite, raised as it were in the shadow of the Law of the Lord. If he asks Jesus this question, we can presume that it is not because he is ignorant of the answer contained in the Law. It is more likely that the attractiveness of the person of Jesus had prompted within him new questions about moral good. He feels the need to draw near to the One who had begun his preaching with this new and decisive proclamation: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15).

People today need to turn to Christ once again in order to receive from him the answer to their questions about what is good and what is evil. Christ is the Teacher, the Risen One who has life in himself and who is always present in his Church and in the world. It is he who opens up to the faithful the book of the Scriptures and, by fully revealing the Father's will, teaches the truth about moral action. At the source and summit of the economy of



salvation, as the Alpha and the Omega of human history (cf. Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), Christ sheds light on man's condition and his integral vocation. Consequently, "the man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly — and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being — must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter him with all his own self; he must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deeper wonder at himself".... Every activity is a providential opportunity for a continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity.

If we therefore wish to go to the heart of the Gospel's moral teaching and grasp its profound and unchanging content, we must carefully inquire into the meaning of the question asked by the rich young man in the Gospel and, even more, the meaning of Jesus' reply, allowing ourselves to be guided by him. Jesus, as a patient and sensitive teacher, answers the young man by taking him, as it were, by the hand, and leading him step by step to the full truth.

The question of the Young man concerns the way to perfection: "If you want to be perfect". The Bible often refers to the call to holiness: « God's will is your sanctification. » (1 Th 4,3)

The Second Vatican Council clearly states this universal vocation to perfection: "... it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity;.. " (LG 40)

What is extraordinary is that Christian vocation to holiness is an invitation to participate in the divine life.

Christian life or spiritual life is always the life of a particular person, with their story, their capabilities and their limitations. Progress in this life depends upon factors linked to the various stages of that person's life. This means, in other words, that Christian spirituality is a Christian lifestyle that is fully inserted in all relationships with the outside world.

Pope John Paul II invited Christians to "reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality which ill accords with the demands of charity, to say nothing of the implications of the Incarnation". (NMI 52)

Christian spirituality is historical because it is experienced as part of human history and, therefore, it is not located in the heights of heaven. Just as we cannot return to our mother's womb, or to renounce life, we cannot evolve in Christian spirituality remaining enclosed and hidden from the world. Christian spirituality engages the person in all their being (body, soul and spirit).

An authentic and durable Christian spirituality immerses its roots in practical tasks, such as service and apostolate in the world of the family, those of work, science, politics, culture and social services.

It is therefore, in this context that the spiritual life of a person evolves. It is enriched with spiritual experiences during different stages of life. At each stage there might be one or several spiritual experiences; prayer, spiritual exercises, contemplation, apostolate, ethical behavior, encounters are often at the root of every spiritual experience. For this reason, each person lives their own spiritual evolution in a very personal manner and it depends, amongst others, on:

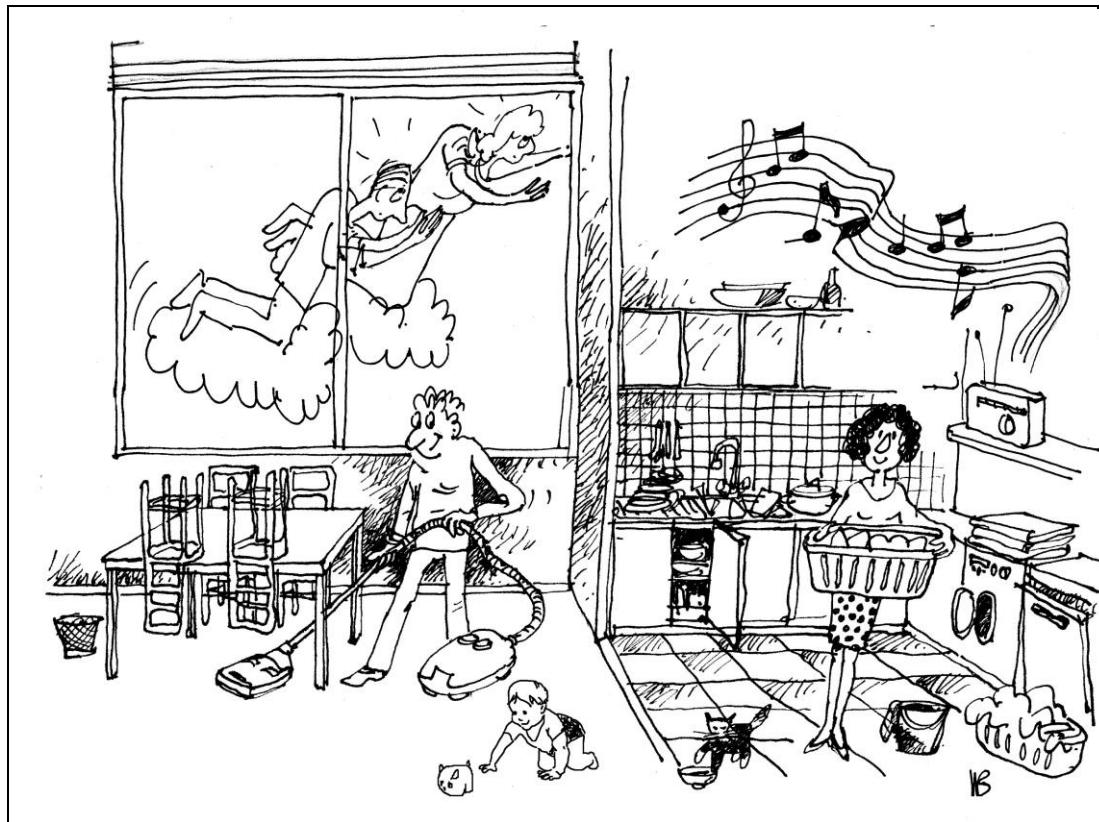
- Individual criteria such as age, sex, marital status, character.
- The quality of the environment,
- Their personal capacity to understand the Word of the Lord and the documents of the Church (doctrine),
- Their moral life and behavior,
- Their prayer life,
- Their inclusion in the church (ministry),
- Their emotional state,
- Finally, their understanding of what constitutes a practically lived Christian life.



5. TEXTS TO STUDY IN DEPTH

Here is a remarkable text of Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici – on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the World:

There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called "spiritual" life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called "secular" life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. The branch, engrafted to the vine which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. In fact, every area of the lay faithful's lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the "places in time" where the love of Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of the Father and service of others. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility-as, for example, skill and solidarity in work, love and dedication in the family and the education of children, service to society and public life and the promotion of truth in the area of culture-are the occasions ordained by Providence for a "continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity". (59)



... Every human activity is an occasion ordained by Providence for a continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity.....

Danilo MONDONI sees spirituality as:

*"A set of principles and practices that characterize the lives of a group of people related to the divine, to the transcendental, to life in the Spirit. What we do with that belief, the different ways in which we experience this transcendence, the means by which life is conceived and lived"*⁸

The Christian concept about the human being indicates a very important aspect of spirituality: it engages the whole person, body, soul and spirit. It is necessary to state that a spirituality related only to a single spirit leads very easily into a non-incarnate "spiritualism" that is undesirable.

The naïve optimism of those who are escaping the world under the pretext of worshiping God is to be avoided.⁹ The ideas presented below will therefore be based on the design of the whole person.¹⁰

⁸ MONDONI, Danilo. *Teologia da espiritualidade Cristã*. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2002, p. 18

⁹ Note, however, that enclosed forms of religious orders do not mean escape from the world but withdrawal and contemplation to devote themselves to prayer and intercession.

¹⁰ "Let us remember that man is not made up of two contradictory or even diverging elements: the body and the soul. He is a body animated by a soul, this soul being incarnated. Man is a whole, a unity. Every form of dualism pretending that the creature made by God in His own image is composed of two juxtaposed realities (we are not saying opposed) must be rejected." (CAFFAREL, Henri. *LA CHAIR ET L'ESPRIT DANS LE MARIAGE*. In *L'anneau d'Or*. Number 1 – 1945 – p. 9)

According to Mondoni, Christian spirituality represents:

- *The life in the Spirit or Christian life itself (oriented towards the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit);*
- *The different ways to experiment and create life in Christ;*
- *The vital reality that is built on the gift of the grace;*
- *A growing communion with God, in which the power of the Holy Spirit leads to a progressive spiritualisation, making the Christian capable of receiving and getting to know God's secrets; this is a theological reality.*

Christian spirituality shows us Christian life itself, in which God is the first and the last. Spiritual life in Christianity starts from faith in the person of Jesus. Adhering to his Word represents the entrance of God into the life of the human being, not as an idea but as a living person. Nevertheless, there is no Christian spirituality without cooperation with Christ and with the community of the faithful.

To conclude, here are some aspects of Christian life presented by Flávio Cavalca de Castro, Spiritual Counselor of Teams. First of all, he asks himself the question:

« If spirituality is meant to lead us to the perfection of Christian life, what then is this Christian life? What does it mean to grow in Christian life? ».¹¹

Here is a summary of his thinking:

- *Become more participatory in the divine life (letting God act in ourselves),*
- *Maximize our potential, in other words, the gifts that the Lord gave us (parable of the talents),*
- *Grow in holiness, that is, being guided by God's call (to take the risk of going even into deep waters),*
- *Be more imbued each time with Christ's ideas, by his way of thinking and acting.*
- *Be subject to God's will that is never an imposition,,*
- *Always turn towards good, towards justice, towards a love without restrictions,*
- *Develop the good qualities that God has placed in every man and woman,*
- *Allow God's love to guide our bodies and our minds,*
- *Follow the moral requirements and religious obligations.*

¹¹ CASTRO, Flávio Cavalca. "Retreat on Congugal Spirituality ». Aparecida, pp. 2-4.



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6. TIPS FOR REFLECTION

- Indicate what challenged you most in this chapter
- Saint Paul said: “*Life to me, of course, is Christ...*” (Phil 1:21) This expression cannot be experienced by those who do not live the Christian faith. In other words: The content of Christian spirituality can be seen only through the medium of a personal experience and a spiritual life that requires constant contact with the Word of God, that enlightens and nourishes them.
- How can you make Christian spirituality more tangible (incarnate) in your everyday life?



7. THE WORD OF THE LORD

With the help of your Spiritual Counselor, choose the reading to study for this chapter that best suits your team. You can also choose a different text:

- Jn 3, 1-8
- Ro 7, 14-25
- Jn 4, 5-30
- 1 Th 2, 14-26
- Co 3, 12-15



8. SUGGESTIONS FOR GROWTH IN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Let us develop concrete projects to access a personal spiritual life more efficiently.

- If Christian spirituality is intended to lead to the perfection of Christian life, what can we do to pursue our growth in Christian life?
- What are the gifts and talents the Lord has given me that I could develop to improve my spirituality?)



9. PRAYER

Each team can choose a different prayer, or song, or else a personal prayer made by the host couple or by another couple.



(Psalm 1)

*Happy the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked,
Nor walks in the way of sinners,
Nor sits in the company of the insolent,
But delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night.*

*He is like tree planted near running water that yields its fruit in due season and whose leaves never fade. (Whatever he does prospers):
Not so the wicked, not so!*

*They are like chaff which the wind drives away.
Therefore in judgment the wicked shall not stand
Nor shall sinners in the assembly of the just
For the Lord watches over the way of the just
But the way of the wicked vanishes,*

CHAPTER 3

CONJUGALITY



1. TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

In preparing for this chapter, and before reading it, think about all changes that have occurred in your life and your behavior since you were married.



2. INTRODUCTION

What do we mean by conjugality?

Conjugality is the “intimate partnership of life and love”¹² experienced by the married couple. From the personalist conception of the sacrament of marriage, the consent of the spouses in marriage should not be regarded only as a single act lived the day of the ceremony. It is the expression of mutual and permanent giving by the spouses. Marriage therefore concerns all aspects of the daily life of the couple.

Conjugality immerses its roots in the love lived as a couple.

The love of the spouses (conjugal love) can have as an ideal model the love of God for his people and that of Christ for his Church. This love can be seen as the visible symbol of the invisible reality of God’s love.

Theology attaches great importance to the symbolical structure of reality which is the sign of another reality, itself founder of all realities, in other words, God. Following this idea, Pope John Paul II showed that “the body and only the body, can make visible what is invisible: the spiritual as the divine; the body was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God and so, be his sign.”¹³



3. THE REALITY

Note : Here we ask you to do an exercise of discernment about the reality as you see and live it in your own country, your region, your parish, in other words there, where you

¹² The definition of conjugal life given by Vatican II.

¹³ See the support text of M Vidal and the Theology of the Body of John Paul II (The Theology of the Body is the name given to all the 129 catechetical talks given by Pope John Paul II between September 1979 and November 1979. They have become essential references for modern theology.)



live. Try to analyze with clarity your situation, try especially to formulate everything that, within the domain of the foundations of Christian spirituality, troubles you and/or fills you with hope. To begin this reflection we offer a few points:

- We can see that today there is great confusion of ideas in the concepts related to love, marriage, and conjugalit. Contraception has developed very rapidly. Advertising in the media and by some manufacturers of contraceptive products often emphasizes a sexual life centered on pleasure, on “everything right now”, and on selfishness. What really counts is personal fulfillment and the individual happiness of the person.
- Fidelity has lost its perspective of continuance. Many couples separate rather easily when they experience problems and each one starts a new relationship without much concern about their children or society. There is also a certain exaltation about homosexuality and a loss of social meaning.
- On the other hand, many couples lead a life of spirituality that is well embodied in practical human existence. They offer to those around them the testimony that a life of holiness is possible at their level and that this life is not the sole preserve of those who are consecrated. It has become a genuine pastoral concern to help the engaged and the newly married. They have a great thirst for the absolute and spirituality. They seek to give new meaning to their lives, a source of happiness to get out of the surrounding materialism.

(Write your observations here))

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4. REFLECTIONS

When two people marry, how they live, their habits, their sense of values necessarily adapt to their new state of life, and that continues as days go by.



A well understood Christian conjugality demands sacrifices from each of the spouses

Consider some examples:

The use of time

Married people learn to manage their lives better taking into account the needs of their spouse and their children. They can no longer spend their time in recreational, cultural, charitable and even religious activities as they did when they were single.

Generosity

It has become an act that must be considered and managed differently depending on responsibilities and the needs of the family and decided by mutual agreement between both spouses.

Spiritual life

It belongs to the privacy of each person. But married people can learn from each other by exchanging experiences and through their conjugal and family prayer.

The integration of sexual life

This integration is done differently when you are single and when you are married. Sexual union is through the gift of oneself in all aspects of life, and not only in the union

of the bodies. Obviously it varies according to the stages of married life and following the responsible planning for births.¹⁴

The practice of forgiveness

Forgiveness (for-give) is not to overlook and forget. Forgiveness is primarily, to continue giving despite the mistake. In the daily life of couples, forgiveness acquires its full meaning in the sense given by Father Varillon: “*forgiveness is the full gratuitousness of the gift*”. Conjugality involves an ongoing exercise of forgiveness.

• Love, supreme value of conjugality

Love is the first value, the one that sums up, that is the origin and purpose of all others. It is the most important characteristic of conjugality.

But, what is love?

Love is not just a feeling: liking someone.

If love were only that, God would not have asked us to love our enemies, because it would be senseless to have a feeling of liking for an enemy.

Nowadays, emotions and passion are overvalued in love. On the other hand, willpower, initiative and surrender of oneself have been undervalued. What is most popular among our contemporaries is a vision of an ephemeral love centered on itself.

Due to a lack of discernment in media consumption, many couples today, in their relationships with others tend to project themselves into the characters and situations of fiction. This phenomenon of imitation often leads to self deception and frequently to profound disillusionment.

The great news of Christianity originates, on one hand, in the revelation that God is a living community of people that love each other (Trinitarian God) and, secondly, in the belief that if man was created in the image and likeness of that God, it is to live and love like Him. That is the way God loves us. He has somehow rescued us through the redemption of his Son. The Incarnation is an incredible gift that God has given to mankind. His Son Jesus loved us as his Father does, with a love that is the gift of Himself. In Christian conjugality, the spouses give themselves to each other with a reciprocal and active love, a love which is also conveyed to their children and others.

The sacrament of marriage, sign of the gift of God to the spouses and of the gift that each spouse makes of himself to their partner, is bound to and resembles Christ’s gift in the Eucharist.

¹⁴ Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman. The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift. (Catechism of the Catholic Church N° 2337)



5. TEXTS TO STUDY IN DEPTH

- **Deos Caritas Est** (An extract from the Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI)

Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united; the challenge of eros can be said to be truly overcome when this unification is achieved. Should he aspire to be pure spirit and to reject the flesh as pertaining to his animal nature alone, then spirit and body would both lose their dignity. On the other hand, should he deny the spirit and consider matter, the body, as the only reality, he would likewise lose his greatness. ...

(...) Nowadays Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed. Yet the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. Eros, reduced to pure "sex", has become a commodity, a mere "thing" to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man's great "yes" to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his sexuality as the purely material part of himself, to be used and exploited at will. Nor does he see it as an arena for the exercise of his freedom, but as a mere object that he attempts, as he pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless. Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere. ...

(...) True, eros tends to rise "in ecstasy" towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing.

6. (...) the Greek version of the Old Testament translates with the similar-sounding agape, which, as we have seen, becomes the typical expression for the biblical notion of love. By contrast with an indeterminate, "searching" love, this word expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice.

It is part of love's growth towards higher levels and inward purification that it now seeks to become definitive, and it does so in a twofold sense: both in the sense of exclusivity (this particular person alone) and in the sense of being "for ever". Love embraces the whole of existence in each of its dimensions, including the dimension of time. It could hardly be otherwise, since its promise looks towards its definitive goal: love looks to the eternal. Love is indeed "ecstasy", not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God.

- « **The three threads link.** » (Xavier Lacroix. Conclusion of a conference)¹⁵

The text below refers to Christ's presence in the couple consecrated by the sacrament of marriage. He is at the heart of this sacrament. As Saint Paul said: “*It is a great mystery!*”

“At a time when the marital relationship is more and more thought and lived as a relationship of couple, according to the dual logic, it may be a mission for Christians to remember or announce the place of a Third party in the relationship. A third party not only symbolic, as is sometimes said in human sciences, but real, very real, more real than the fantasies pursued by our passions.

There are various figures of this third party, in social life, in fraternal life, in the ecclesial community and, as we have seen in children, God is the vital third party, the absolute third party, whose life gives the link its greatest strength, insofar as it is received.

I emphasize this, because this gift, must still be received. As the poet Paul Claudel once wrote: "All omnipotence of God stops at the door of the man's heart....."

(...) But this should not prevent us from seeing, from daring to say, and first of all from experiencing, how to receive the gift of divine life, which is the grace of the sacrament, consolidates the link by giving it the capability to always be reborn and begin again.

We well know that this is very practical in Teams. We can experience every day, every week, every month, how much prayer, that is to say the conscious entry into the circulation of the Trinitarian gift, brings us into a communion which is broader than ours, strengthens our relationship and helps us to do what is necessary to keep it alive.

This broader communion will be, not exclusively but especially, the communion with our fellow team members.



6. TIPS FOR REFLECTION

- Indicate what challenged you most in this chapter
- Regarding the practice of conjugal values; could you give some other examples which are not included in the text? (For example the management of the family's financial resources, hospitality, etc....)
- Can you share some experiences regarding the practice of values in your married life?

¹⁵ LACROIX, Xavier. “*Le lien à trois fils*”. Conference given in Santiago de Compostela, during the International Gathering of Teams, September 2000.



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7. THE WORD OF THE LORD

With the help of your Spiritual Counselor, choose the reading to study for this chapter that best suits your team. You can also choose a different text:

Mt 19, 3-9

Mc 10, 2-12

Ho 3, 1-5



8. SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROWTH IN CONJUGALITY

Starting with the little things of everyday life, become aware of the practice of forgiveness in your marital relationship or in your other relationships.



9. FINAL PRAYER

Each team can choose a different prayer, or song, or else a personal prayer made by the host couple or by another couple.

PSALM 128

R/. Happy are you who fear the Lord, who fully love his will!

Happy are you who fear the Lord, who walk in his
ways!

For you shall eat the fruit of your handwork; happy shall you be, and favored. !

R/.

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
in the recesses of your home;
Your children like olive plants
around your table.

R/.

Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord.
The Lord blesses you from Zion: may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of
your life.

May you see your children's children

Peace be upon Israel!

R/.

CHAPTER 4

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY



1. TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

- Do you think that you live a true conjugal spirituality in your marriage?
- If yes, give some examples.
- If not, why not?



2. INTRODUCTION

Conjugal spirituality is a relatively recent concept of the Christian spirituality we studied in Chapter Two. It was especially enhanced and developed from the mid-twentieth century under the leadership of Fr. Henry Caffarel within the Teams of Our Lady Movement.

According to our founder, *conjugal spirituality is the art of living in a practical way the Christian perfection proposed by Christ in the Gospel in all real life situations and in the various states of life of the Christian couple.*¹⁶

For the married couple this represents an extremely rewarding form of spirituality. In fact, it guides the life of the spouses towards happiness by the deliberate choice to take a path to perfection that leads well beyond the simply temporal horizons of seeking the well-being and pleasure of the couple. This pathway allows spouses to achieve a greater level of maturity in the divine love because it pushes towards the dynamism of action. In fact, spouses are not content to learn and obey certain rules. They involve themselves, by making the Gospel the plan of their couple and family life, to give witness to the real presence of God's love in the church and in the world today.



3. THE REALITY

Note: Here we ask you to do an exercise of discernment about the reality as you see and live it in your own country, your region, your parish, in other words there, where you live. Try to analyze with clarity your situation, try especially to formulate everything that, within the domain of the foundations of Christian spirituality, troubles you and/or fills you with hope. To begin this reflection we offer a few points:

¹⁶ CAFFAREL, Henri. "COME AND FOLLOW ME" ». Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre-Dame, 16th year – n. 2 – November 1962.

- 50 years ago, the Scripture was part of the knowledge base of a large number of people from an early age. It was taught in the family and at school. Every Sunday, it was proclaimed and commented on in parishes. It was recognized and respected everywhere. Nowadays, the knowledge of this Gospel has often become deficient or fragmented especially among young people. Religious education, under the pretext of respecting individual freedom, does not encourage reading the sacred texts or to get to know the person of Christ, and that as well as religious practice is greatly reduced.
- In the middle of last century, Christian marriage was still not considered a great sacrament. A specific spirituality for the couple did not exist. However, from the 50's it has gradually developed. Very quickly, the hierarchy became aware of the richness and usefulness of this form of spirituality. The last Council echoed this to a large extent.
- In the past, spirituality was highly supervised and directed by priests and religious. It was usually reserved for an elite, either an individual or groups of people. Today, spirituality has become more the domain of the individual conscience because it responds to an interior call that immerses itself in faith and reason.
- Today, the apostolic role of married laymen in the church is universally valued and encouraged from all quarters.

(Write your observations here)

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4. REFLECTIONS

The Second Vatican Council had already clearly shown that holiness was not a kind of goal to achieve, but rather a way of living by adopting and relying on the evangelic values day after day .

This way of life echoes the divine life of the Trinity. It has become extremely important in today's world to show that living this way remains within the realm of possibility for each couple. It is not a task reserved for a privileged few. Because there are no first and second class Christians, all the baptized, and therefore all the laity and Christian couples have been called by God to rise to the heights of holiness and apostolate to give witness to his love for humanity.

Conjugal spirituality is not made up of the sum of two spiritualities, the wife's and the husband's. They are very different with each one of the spouses having their own story, freedom and personal conscience. There can be no question of melting them into one!

In Chapter 3 we saw that conjugal spirituality is expressed and guides the life of the couple on the basis of conjugal love. It is precisely upon an intimate community of conjugal love that the alliance between the spouses is based, and then conjugal spirituality is built little by little.

It is important to remember that in Christianity, all spiritual life begins with faith in the person of Christ. We can then understand that the couple has great interest in learning to know about Christ and especially to understand his message. However, contrary to what our parents experienced, the current climate is not as favorable. The serious reduction in the number of priests, the deterioration in religion teaching, the loss of confidence in the Institution of the Church, accepted in many Church documents, secularization imposed more and more by civil society, certainly do not facilitate this knowledge. Ironically today, a very strong need for spirituality is developing in various groups of reflection, prayer, retreats and others. This is a very encouraging phenomenon!

Conjugal Spirituality is well anchored in mankind. Esther and Marcelo AZEVEDO, a Brazilian Teams couple, presented some ideas about this and here is the basis:

"Conjugal Spirituality concerns spiritual life, but it is deeply embodied, implanted in the everyday and lived in the setting of coexistence every day. It cannot be confined to a complex of rites and practices which do not have any contact with reality. Conjugal Spirituality is a path that leads to God, driven by the Spirit, through all the realities in which we live. Not being formed by the sum of two spiritualities, it does not exclude in any way, the personal spirituality of each spouse. Living conjugal spirituality is to act the sacrament through gestures, words and actions specific to the natural love that unites the couple."¹⁷



5. TEXTS TO STUDY IN DEPTH

In this work, following the tradition of Teams, we will focus only on conjugal spirituality among Catholics who have conferred on each other the sacrament of marriage.

¹⁷ AZEVEDO, Esther & Luiz Marcelo. A espiritualidade do casal: temas de um retiro espiritual. Aparecida (SP): Editora Santuário, 2006, pp. 77-107

“Behind conjugal spirituality, there is a call from Christ: ‘*We, spouses, “our vocation” is to go to Christ together, one and the other, one with the other, one for the other.*’”¹⁸

“The source of Christian love”, Fr. Caffarel also maintains, *is not in a person’s heart. It is in God. To spouses who want to love, who want to learn to love more and more, there is only one piece of advice: Seek God, love God, be united to God, give Him all the space ...*¹⁹ *God is the origin of love, but He is also at its end. Love comes from God, it goes to God: God is the alpha and omega of love ...*²⁰

Conjugal Spirituality derives from the grace received by the consecration of marriage which is a special grace destined to the perfection of the love of the spouses and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. This grace also contributes to mutual sanctification throughout married life and also to the mutual acceptance and education of children.

In the sacrament of marriage there is a double alliance. The covenant between the spouses who give themselves the sacrament and the covenant of Christ with the spouses. This is the “great mystery” of which St. Paul’s speaks regarding marriage and, at the same time, the great gift of God to the couple: God, the faithful friend par excellence, is committed with the couple who can fully confide in their faithful love through the presence and help of Christ.

In Gaudium et Spes :

“Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfil their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God.” (GS 48, 2)

Living Conjugal Spirituality allows them to do God’s will and it becomes for them a place of love, a place of happiness and a path to holiness. This is what allows them to achieve their mission and their ministry in the specific apostolate of the couple and the family, in the church and in the world.

“Married people, you have limited time to study, to deepen your faith; some of you are suffering, others readily commit themselves, too happy for such a good excuse that exempts them from a laborious research.

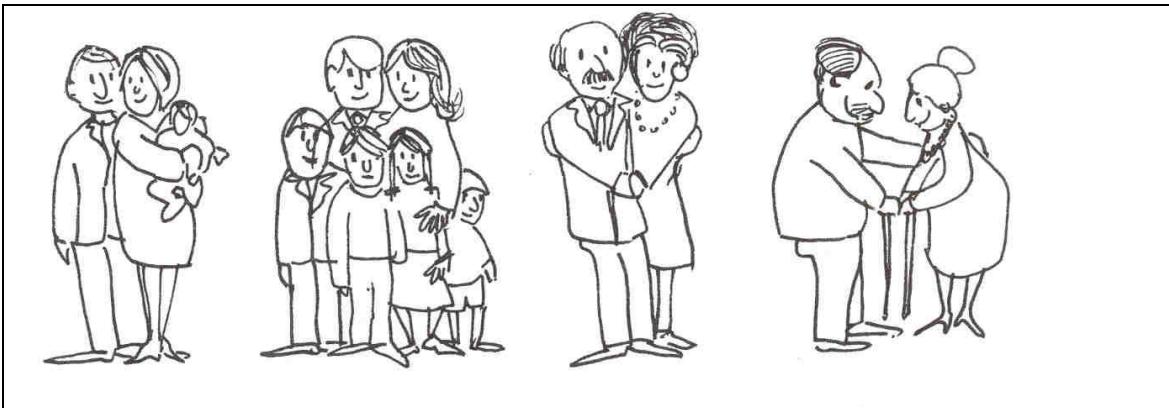
You forget that there are no books to speak about God: you have at home a Bible in images, if I may say so; that you do not leaf through! I want to speak about all these family realities that are yours: conjugal love, fatherhood, motherhood, childhood, the

¹⁸ CAFFAREL, Henri. *Pour une spiritualité du chrétien marié.* Op. Cit., pp. 249-250

¹⁹ CAFFAREL, Henri. *Lotissements.* In L’anneau d’or. Number 35 – September – October 1950 – pp. 310 to 311 [1- p.4]

²⁰ CAFFAREL, Henri. *Pour une spiritualité du chrétien marié.* Op. Cit., pp. 249-250

home.....this is what God has found more explicit to make Himself known. To make those who do not marry jealous....!''²¹



At all stages of married life, conjugal love is what God has found more explicit to make Himself known!



6. TIPS FOR REFLECTION

- What did you discover in this Chapter ?
- What differences do you find between your way of thinking about marriage and that of those who have not had the opportunity to know Teams?
- Exchange as a couple your experiences on the basis of your conjugal spirituality. During the meeting, discuss and compare your reflections with those of the other couples in your team.



7. THE WORD OF THE LORD

With the help of your Spiritual Counselor, choose the reading to study for this chapter that best suits your team. You can also choose a different text:

- Jn 15, 7 – 17
- Tb 8, 4 – 8
- Gn 1, 26-31
- Ep 5, 21-33

²¹ CAFFAREL, Henri. *Votre bible en images* – L'Anneau d'or n° 77 – p.362



8. SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROWTH IN CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY

"There is no path, we plan it as we walk"

Antonio Marchado (Chilean poet).

Conjugal spirituality does not have an end point, it is therefore a path. What have you chosen to do to better plan your route?



9. FINAL PRAYER

Each team can choose a different prayer, or song, or else a personal prayer made by the host couple or by another couple.

*God,
I do not know here He is.
I was told
That He was everywhere,
But I have not seen Him anywhere.*

*God,
By dint of searching for Him,
I met people
Looking for him too.
They failed to tell me
Where God was hidden,
But they had for me.
Great tenderness*

*I wondered then:
Would it not be
in this tenderness
that God saw?*

*Since, like them,
I try to give
this tenderness
To those I meet...*

*Benoît Marchon
« Poèmes pour prier », Centurion*

CHAPTER 5

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

1. TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING



- What do you understand by spiritual maturity?
- Do you feel that you have grown in your knowledge of Christ through being members of Teams?
- In what area do you feel that you have made progress?

2. INTRODUCTION



When a union between a man and a woman is born, they try to get to know each other better and to create links for a greater bond between them; it is therefore clear that there would be no conjugal spirituality possible without looking for a greater intimacy with the person and the message of Christ. Conjugal spirituality, like any project of love, begins with a shorter or longer period of initiation.

Loving Christ, adhering to his Gospel, represents the entrance of God into the life of a human being, and therefore into the life of a couple. This entry does not take place as an idea, but as a very real presence of a living person. Divine love can therefore participate directly in our conjugal love.

When we become aware of this unique relationship, it is possible for the couple to establish a common life project with God. This project is always established freely, without any restriction, like a journey in love. This course does not necessarily follow a straight line where the different stages are predetermined and with progress steadily increasing.

Saint John clearly locates the divine project: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that those who believe in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting. For God did not send his Son into the world in order to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him...”* (Jn 3, 16-17)

Because of our weakness and mistakes, the falls are frequent. But the constant presence and trust of a Father who loves and forgives us, changes all perspectives. As Father Varillon said: *“God’s fatherhood can only be experienced in forgiveness.”* That fatherhood tries to cheer us up constantly and encourages us to act in a new balance of confidence. Demand and forgiveness are the two inseparable faces of the project of love that God has for us.

“There is no marital bond that can endure without forgiveness. To forgive does not mean ‘to be crushed’. It is not forgetting the past, suppressing resentment, letting ourselves be destroyed in silence. True forgiveness, as suggested in the book of Leviticus (19, 17) means being able to tell the other person the wrong they have done to us. Forgiveness is the “gift beyond” the offense, the renewal of confidence, the desire to recreate the relationship. It requires the courage to speak and clarify. It is one of the most challenging human acts to do, as well as asking forgiveness. The grace of the Holy Spirit will not be superfluous there.”²²



3. THE REALITY

Note: Here we ask you to do an exercise of discernment about the reality as you see and live it in your own country, your region, your parish, in other words there, where you live. Try to analyze with clarity your situation, try especially to formulate everything that, within the domain of the foundations of Christian spirituality, troubles you and/or fills you with hope. To begin this reflection we offer a few points:

- There is today a great devaluation and even a desecration of the institution of marriage. Many spouses live today in a world where many of them have not only lost their traditional bearings, but above all trust for those who traditionally responsible for guiding them.
- Following scientific advances and the globalization of the economy, political leaders of the world, as well as religious leaders, do not know how to respond to difficult and fundamental questions that had never been asked with such intensity before. These questions concern the authority, the social meaning, information, the availability to serve, the family, work sharing, poverty, sexuality, transmittal and respect for life, the dignity of the person, etc. Acquiring sufficient understanding has become difficult and time consuming.
- To establish and build a couple does not mean, joining two persons on a specific day. Marriage is a new state of life where each person gives themselves to and receives the other throughout their life. Each is transformed by the other’s personality. Love is built daily through very different acts (mutual care, physical embraces, work management, meal preparation, hosting friends, education and management of children’s activities , crisis management and reconciliations). That’s living married life!
- In the field of conjugal spirituality “everything, immediately” does not exist. Its implementation requires a long process during which the couples are made up, fall apart and are re-formed sometimes several times.

²² LACROIX, Xavier. “Le lien à trois fils”. Conference given in Santiago de Compostela, during the International Gathering of Teams, September 2000.

(Write your observations here)

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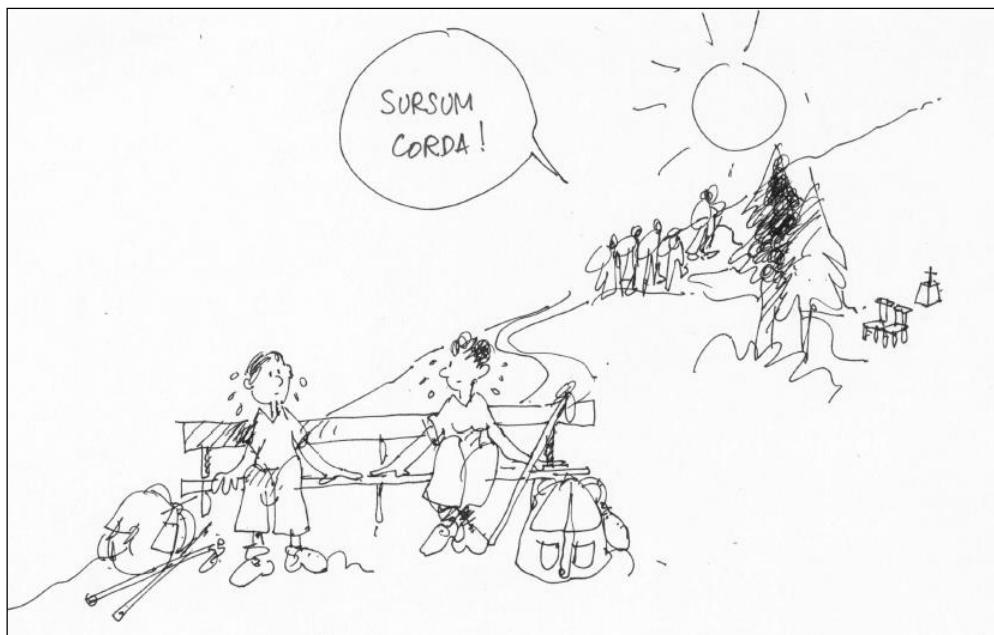
4. REFLECTIONS

Intimacy with the divine does not appear suddenly in the couple following the miraculous effects of the graces received the day of their marriage. It is not us who make God present and active in our life as a couple, in the church and in the world by our sheer hard work and our goodwill. It is only to the extent that we make a place for his Son within ourselves that everything becomes possible.

Conjugal spirituality requires a phase of initiation. Just as we need time to become adults, some time, perhaps many years, are needed to discover and learn to grow in the depth of the divine covenant. As the tree does not bear fruit when it is small, we must give it time! Love, like the tree, needs to have deep roots to develop with the seasons of life and bear fruit.

It is understandable that an emerging conjugal spirituality cannot be limited to a simple initiation to spiritual life. Obviously, the latter is necessary, but it is not sufficient. That would mean being happy to remain on the surface without trying to put down deep roots! It is not only a matter of working the soil that will receive the seed, but the plant must be tracked throughout its growth. This important search cannot be made in isolation, but occurs within a team of couples: "*It is because they feel weak when they are alone and have unfailing confidence in mutual fellowship that they decide to set up a team.*"²³

²³ END. The Charter of Equipes Notre-Dame.



For us....initiation was enough!

So it is with the help of the Spiritual Counselor and other members of the team that conjugal spirituality is built and strengthened gradually in an increasingly adult approach. If conjugal spirituality is sourced in the love of God (something that must be discovered at the beginning), it grows and expands progressively thanks to a pedagogy that we will develop later in Chapter 7.

Father Caffarel and the last four Popes were convinced that only a living and adult conjugal spirituality could make couples capable of regenerating and making faith attractive today. Making it attractive, operates through enticement and not in the clamor of rhetoric, or in extraordinary events.

"The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave." (1 K 19, 11 – 13)

The kingdom of God is not in the storm, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire but in the fragile, simple and tangible presence of the testimony to a life of love, forgiveness and sharing! This reign of God is within all of us! We do not need to look for it elsewhere!

"On being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.' (Lk 17, 20-21)

Conjugal spirituality is also closely related to each stage of life. At each stage of life, an inner voice urges us to search for meaning and give value to our daily life. Spiritual life is always closely related to the practical life of a woman, a man, a couple, with their expectations, their possibilities, but also with their limitations, their poverty, their successes and their failures. It is after all, their story that is involved.

Like the stages leading to adulthood, spiritual maturity evolves and grows continuously with age and people's needs. To remain dynamic at every stage of life, we must be attentive to the signs of the times in seeking God's will every day, seeking the truth about yourself and experiencing the encounter and communion with those close to us.



5. TEXTS TO STUDY IN DEPTH

The objective of conjugal spirituality: holiness

*"We are called to holiness, but a saint is not primarily, as many people imagine, a kind of champion who performs feats of virtue, spiritual achievements. Above all it is a person captivated by God. Who delivers their entire life to God You are called to holiness. And it is in and through marriage that you need to aim at it."*²⁴

Holiness is not only a goal but an attitude to life, a way of behaving day by day, according to the evangelical values like fullness of Christian life and experience of charity. It means to answer Christ's call "*Come and follow me*". "*Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity;...*"²⁵

Holiness is related to likeness with God, i.e. to the availability, through grace, that allows a response to the call to holiness. The image of God that is a free gift to mankind becomes real when the couple lets the Holy Spirit act freely in its life. The text in Mt 5 shows the "about-face" made by Jesus. The Old Testament speaks of "holiness", and Jesus speaks about "perfection" in the light of the holiness of God, the Father. The invitation then is to move from exteriority (holiness by following the law) to interiority (perfection by letting God act in ourselves), in a process that makes us resemble God.

We no longer think that holiness is possible only for certain categories of privileged people and that there are first and second-class faithful. Laymen also have the possibility to rise to the heights of holiness and apostolate.

The contemporary disciple of Christ will save his soul not by escaping the world, but, on the contrary, by acting in the world to maximise the divine potentialities of creation.

So, the need for a new means to live spirituality arises. Today, to be holy is not enough; a holiness for the current times is needed, a new holiness, that is also unprecedented. The novelty is that it has become accessible to lay people, living the values, the expectations and the beauty of the Gospel, embodying them in their lives embedded in the world.

*Cidinha and Igar FEHR, former members of the International Leading Team (ERI), suggest some important ideas about Conjugal Spirituality as a path to holiness:*²⁶

²⁴ CAFFAREL, Henri. SEDUCED BY GOD. Monthly Letter of Équipes Notre-Dame. 16th year – n. 10 – July 1963.

²⁵ Lumen Gentium, n. 40.

²⁶ FEHR, Maria Aparecida e Igar, « Falando de Espiritualidade conjugal ». Petropolis (RJ): Vozes, Colecao Nossa Familia, N° 10, 1994, pp.9-11. Cité par DE FIORES. Op. Cit., p. 26.

- “Spirituality is the means by which we seek to know, interpret and understand God’s will on our lives and what our response should be on the path to holiness. This is the direction we give to our life, from the values revealed by Jesus Christ;
- *Conjugal spirituality directs life from the fact of living as a pair. The life of each member of the couple, in daily life, in their relationship with each other and predominantly in their relationship with God, is distinguished by marriage.*
- *True spirituality covers all aspects of life. It incorporates in spiritual life all the elements that make up the path of a human life; elements that are scattered in an endless number of situations, activities, influences, common life, family, marital, professional, even if sometimes the spouses are in conflict with each other.”*

Father Caffarel was specifically watchful that Teams of Our Lady should not content themselves with being nurseries for adults. From the inception of the Movement he constantly pushed team members to engage in all areas of life and to be concerned about staying creative in their lives. Conjugal spirituality is gradually developing in this newly acquired spiritual maturity. It grows thanks to our desire to progress in the humanity and love of Christ.

All this knowledge eventually propels these couples to respond practically to God’s call, to commit themselves today in the dough of the Church and the world as a new leaven. All this accumulated experience is indeed capable of regenerating the bread today by restoring the lost flavor and above all giving back hope to the wounded couples and families.

“Much more than a movement for initiation to perfection and holiness, members of Teams are called to ensure that in tomorrow’s Church and world there will be an apostolate of renewal and hope.”²⁷

The Sermon on the Mount is an expression of spiritual maturity!



6. TIPS FOR REFLECTION

- What challenged you in this Chapter?
- Looking back on your coupleness, in what area have you acquired the greatest spiritual maturity?



7. THE WORD OF THE LORD

²⁷ CAFFAREL, Henri. « Vocation and itinerary of the Équipes Notre-Dame ». In l’anneau d’Or. Number 87-88 – May – August 1959 – Special Issue « A thousand couples in Rome » Pages 239 to 256.

With the help of your Spiritual Counselor, choose the reading to study for this chapter that best suits your team. You can also choose a different text:

- Mt 5, 1 – 12
- Mt 5, 38 – 48
- Mt 7, 21 – 27
- Lk 10, 38 – 42
- Lk 18, 18 – 23
- Ga 3, 1 – 5
- Col 3, 12- 17
- Ep 1, 3 – 14



8. SUGGESTIONS FOR GROWTH IN CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY

Why not take advantage of the resources offered by the Movement? It would be nice to rediscover the dynamics of the Endeavors.



9. FINAL PRAYER

Each team can choose a different prayer, or song, or else a personal prayer made by the host couple or by another couple.

*We are two
But you are there, o Lord,
In the middle of our life.
We are different
But each one at our own pace,
We advance towards You,
Getting deeper over the days
The total gift of one to the other,
We are open to your Love:
He is waiting to receive from me a word, a gesture
To cheer him up and feel surrounded.
I expect from him an attentive ear to my needs and my fatigue.
Enclosed in the prison of our selfishness,
We find it hard to join you,
But always, the little flame of your presence
Releases love in us.
Nourished by your word,
Bathed by your Spirit
We walk towards You.
Blessed are You! God among us, Emmanuel*

Dominique (revue Alliance n° 100)

CHAPTER 6

THE MEANS OF CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY



1. TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

- What are the means that you have found most useful in progressing your conjugal spirituality?



2. INTRODUCTION

It is important to live the marital reality of the mutual gift, not only in the spiritual realm, but also in material things. In this way the couple will be able to better enjoy the conditions and gifts they have to find happiness. In conjugal spirituality, this is an essential element!

To progress in spiritual life it is useful to not only know, but also to use the means that are essential to nourish our limited nature in space and time. For this, it is best to place oneself in an attitude of prayer and look after one's religious formation.

The implementation of these two components, (prayer and formation) is essential to find consistency between faith and life. The three pillars of the pedagogy of Teams (guidelines for life, the endeavors, and team life) provide a solid foundation to help them grow gradually in conjugal spirituality.

In this Chapter we will draw your attention to some means, among others, that we find particularly important...



3. THE REALITY OF THE MEANS USED

Note: To introduce this reflection, we offer a few points:

- We live in a world today that has become extremely individualist. Everyone wants to lead their life in their own way. This trend includes spiritual life, even though we can see a new impetus towards spirituality among the young.
- On the other hand, we are living in a word guided by the senses. Only what we can see, hear and touch exist, the rest does not! Reason is no longer the way used to persuade.
- Young people increasingly do not want to get married. They are afraid to commit. Some live together, and those who want to get married, do it much later. How can we then speak about conjugal spirituality under these conditions?



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4. REFLECTIONS

For Christians, spirituality means believing in the person of Christ letting him live and act in our lives. When speaking about spirituality, we must take as reference those people who live with “both feet on the ground”. Referring to couples in Teams of Our Lady, Fr. Caffarel said: *“Far from seeking ways to escape the world, they make an effort to learn, following Christ’s example, to serve God throughout their life, in this world.”*²⁸

How to achieve this ideal of life? Masters of spiritual life argue that to achieve this ideal, it is necessary to be involved in a voluntary approach and follow a special pedagogy, which requires real discipline. The couple who learn how to live a Christian marital and family life, has the opportunity to practice asceticism: that is to practice loving as Christ loved: *“Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one.”* (1Cor 9, 25)

If spirituality means living in accordance with the Spirit of Christ, it is obvious that without the help of the same Spirit it is impossible to live it. The only way to receive the cooperation of the Holy Spirit is through prayer: *“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* (Lk 11, 13) It is for this reason that personal and couple prayer occupies a privileged place in the pedagogy of conjugal spirituality.

²⁸ CAFFAREL, HENRI. *A suspect word*. Monthly Letter of Équipes Notre-Dame. 3rd Year, n° 8 - June 1950.



Prayer occupies a privileged place in the pedagogy of conjugal spirituality

Marital dialogue, mutual assistance within the family, exchanging points of view and sharing of experiences and formation are also means that enable progress in the couple's life. Christian couples who want the progress in their spirituality incorporate them in their Christian life.



5. TEXTS TO STUDY IN DEPTH

The means proposed by Fr. Caffarel to develop conjugal spirituality are: constant listening to the Word of God, silent Prayer, Conjugal Prayer and the Eucharist.

- **Constant listening to the Word of God**

*"The Word of Christ in the Gospel, is not only teaching, commandment, profession of love, it is an act. It works. This voice that I hear when I read the Gospel is the very one that calmed the raging storm, that healed leprosy, the very one that raised the dead that forgave sins, that engendered the children of God."*²⁹

There are several sources and methods to discern God's will but all of them must be anchored in prayer and reading the Word of God, because they take their source from the Revelation that God made of Himself. This enables man to walk towards Him, to give sense to human life.

²⁹ CAFFAREL, Henri. *The Mystery of the Gospel*. Monthly Letter of Équipes Notre-Dame. 17th year – n°. 4 – January 1964.

This is why you must “do away with all the impurities and bad habits that are still left in you – accept and submit to the word which has been planted in you and can save your souls. But you must do what the word tells you, and not just listen to it and deceive yourselves. To listen to the word and not obey is like looking at your own features in a mirror and then, after a quick look, going off and immediately forgetting what you looked like. But the man who looks steadily at the perfect law of freedom and makes that his habit – not listening and then forgetting, but actively putting it into practice – will be happy in all that he does.” (Jm – 1, 21-25)

- Silent Prayer

“Prayer is a meeting of love with Christ to which I am invited. Christian faith is not a set of philosophical or religious beliefs, it is an adherence to Christ’s person that leads us to the Father in the breath of the Spirit. Praying, then, will be going to meet Christ. Prayer is a meeting, a private meeting to which I am invited.”³⁰

- Conjugal Prayer

“Conjugal prayer is an extension of our Sacrament of Marriage....One of the purposes of conjugal prayer is to maintain in us the grace of marriage... It is, more or less, like repeating every night our sacramental yes....! It is true, conjugal prayer is the highlight of the sacrament of marriage. Married Christians sometimes ask themselves how to profit from the graces of the sacrament. Penance, the Eucharist, they know what to do to resort to their own graces, but Marriage? We must not hesitate to answer that conjugal prayer is an excellent way to obtain from the sacrament of marriage the graces it has in store for the spouses. If all Christian couples were convinced of the importance of conjugal prayer, if conjugal prayer were alive in all those couples, there would be a vast increase of joy, love and grace in the world.”³¹

- The Eucharist

“The gift of the body of Jesus as an expression of total offering”, comments a contemporary author, “it makes the human body become extremely worthy and makes it possible to compare the union in marriage with that of Christ with his Church.” The sacrament of marriage, a sign of God’s union with the spouses, is linked with and resembles the gift of Christ in the Eucharist. There is a close relationship between these two sacraments.

“My conclusion will be brief” said Fr. Caffarel, “only one sentence! Marriage is the marvelous invention of Christ for the Eucharist to be lived as one.”³²

³⁰ This quote was inspired by the itinerary proposed by the SR France-Suisse-Luxembourg at the holiday session in Massabielle - 28 July to 3 August 2002 – on the teachings of Father Caffarel.

³¹ CAFFAREL, Henri. *Conjugal Prayer* – Report of a Survey- Monthly Letter of Equipes Notre-Dame. Special Number – March 1962.

³² CAFFAREL, Henri. *Marriage and the Eucharist*. In L’Anneau d’Or – MARRIAGE, ROAD TO GOD. Special Issue 117-118 – May - August 1964 – pages 242 – 265.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is also important as a source of God's graces, mercy and forgiveness. It is also an interesting tool because it opens the doors to the reconciliation and selflessness of the couple in their search for balance and consistency between faith and life.

- **The other means of formation**

It is advisable that spouses adopt and maintain an attitude of readiness and research, not only concerning the deepening of their faith but also towards everything concerning the various aspects of the family, social, pastoral and professional life. All other means proposed above would be senseless if they are not lived concretely. Above all, do not be afraid to risk commitment to assume responsibility in the Movement, the church and the world. It is from this risk-taking, this spirit of poverty that "the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you." (Mt 10, 20) and that we will be reflections of the Father for those who criticize us and to all those who know nothing about the Good News of Marriage.



6. TIPS FOR REFLECTION

- Are you aware of the difficulty of living spirituality without the support of a community of faith?
- Can you share your own experience of God?
- What are the ways that have helped you most in your journey towards conjugal spirituality?



7. THE WORD OF THE LORD

With the help of your Spiritual Counselor, choose the reading to study for this chapter that best suits your team. You can also choose a different text:

Jn 1, 30-31; 35-42.

Mt 6, 5-13.

Lk 11, 1-13.

Lk 11, 27-28.

Jn 13, 1-15.

1 Jn 2, 3-11.

1 Jn 5, 14-17



8. SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROWTH IN CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY

"All Scripture is inspired by God and can profitably be used for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be holy. This is how the man who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work." (2Tm 3, 16-17).

Prepare a project to progress in listening to the Word of God and frequenting the sacraments.



9. FINAL PRAYER

Each team can choose a different prayer, or song, or else a personal prayer made by the host couple or by another couple.

(**Psalm 42, 1-3, 9; 43, 5**)

R./ My soul thirsts for You, my God

As a doe longs
for running streams,
So my soul longs for you,
my God. **R/**

My soul thirsts for God,
The living God;
When shall I go and behold
The face of God? **R/**

My tears are my food,
Day and night,
And all day long I hear:
'Where is your God?' **R/**

I will say to God my Rock
Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I walk so mournfully,
Oppressed by the enemy? **R/**

Why so downcast, my soul,
Why do you sigh within me?
Put your hope in God: I shall praise him yet,
My savior and my God.

CHAPTER 7

TEAMS OF OUR LADY, A SCHOOL OF CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY



1. TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

- For you personally and for your coupleness, is it clear that Teams of Our Lady are a school of formation and a school that helps you grow in your conjugal spirituality?
- If you were asked what you have learned in Teams, what would you answer?



2. INTRODUCTION

Couples who join Teams have the opportunity to live in a school of conjugal spirituality that helps them to progress in the practice of prayer, conjugal dialogue, human and spiritual mutual aid, the discernment of which are all incarnations of the evangelical values in their personal, conjugal, family, and professional life and in their pastoral commitments.

There are several reasons to assert that Teams have always been and still are an authentic charism (exceptional gift) given by God to the Church.

- The inspiration and the assistance of the Holy Spirit were given to Father Caffarel and to the first couples. They allowed them to trace a path of extraordinary discoveries of the richness of Christian marriage. It was a gift for those who laid the first foundations, but also for all women and men who followed in their footsteps.
- From the pedagogy that was gradually developed and perfected by the first team members, it was later developed and expanded by those who followed them adapting it to the new times and cultures but always remaining faithful to the founding charism.
- By the reception, and then by the support of the Hierarchy of the Church that encouraged the spread of the Movement.



3. THE REALITY

Note: Here we ask you to do an exercise of discernment about the reality as you see and live it in your own country, your region, your parish, in other words there, where you



live. Try to analyze with clarity your situation, try especially to formulate everything that, within the domain of the foundations of Christian spirituality, troubles you and/or fills you with hope. To begin this reflection we offer a few points:

- In a world where the concept of love as a gift of oneself is often questioned, where the institution of marriage and family values are often denied in favor of new kinds of unions and community life, where the sexual morality of the Church is challenged, what can Teams offer us practically?
- Many married people, even Catholics, are living their spirituality in an individual way today, each in their separate ways. Where family ministry is limited to the preparation for the sacraments (is this the case for your?) what assistance does the pedagogy of Teams offer you?
- Are you aware that strengthened by the richness received, you are called to an authentic Pastoral ministry for the couple and the family among all today's couples. If so, in what way are you the feet and hands, the heart and eyes, the ears and lips of the Church, there where you live? Exchange between you some practical experiences.
- The methodology and the pedagogy of Teams are demanding. It is clear that nobody forced us to join or to stay in teams. Are we playing the game honestly? In our team is there a mentality tending to reject anything that requires effort in the application of the pedagogy of the Movement?

(Write your observations here)

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4. REFLECTIONS

It should be noted that introduction to the pedagogy of Teams happens, not by obeying religious principles, but by the lure of mutual exchanges. Welcoming the richness of the diversity of others and sharing the fruit of our own experiences is an extraordinary experience of trust and sharing life experiences. It is in this context that progress takes place. The entire pedagogy is focused on this progressiveness.

Teams' pedagogy has gradually developed to help couples to start living a Christian life as a couple and progress in their conjugal spirituality. The latter is not acquired spontaneously. It is built and husband and wife are required to make continuous efforts.

The three pillars of the Teams' pedagogy are:

- The Endeavors,
- The team meetings,
- The orientations for life.

Their purpose is to help us adopt three fundamental attitudes:

- To search constantly for God's will,
- To discover the truth about ourselves,
- To experience meeting and communion.

There are several stages in the spiritual evolution of the couple. In fact, they are not only related to the age of the people and the number of years they have been married, but also to the cycles of the couple's life and to the level of spiritual evolution of each.

As we have already said: each type of spirituality has its own pedagogy. The spirituality of Teams proposes an original and special pedagogy for married Christian couples. It focuses initially on the progressive discovery as a team of the extraordinary positive resources offered by Christian marriage. Secondly, through the practice of prayer, sharing, listening to the Word of God, and also through the efforts made freely, with a desire to meet, practice mutual assistance and fellowship, the couples of the team progress in a practical way towards a truer, deeper and more communicative happiness.

All these achievements lead to the engagement of these couples in the dough of the church and the world as a new leaven capable of regenerating today's bread and restore hope to those who are wounded by love and by family.

Teams pedagogy is then a real school that helps couples to live their ideal in a better way. In this school, all couples are at the same time students and teachers, because it is through sharing of experiences and mutual support that couples are able to learn and better understand that to which they are called. Participation in this "school" requires them to adopt a proactive attitude, necessary to become capable of giving themselves to others and receiving from others, in all humility.

The mystique of Teams, its deep meaning, is based on three fundamental pillars: the meetings of couples always in the name of Christ (a team is more than a human community), the spiritual and material mutual assistance between couples (to support each other in their efforts) and the testimony (to show, there where they live, that conjugal spirituality is a path that leads to true love, happiness and holiness). Indeed, we are not Christians for ourselves, but for others.

Teams' members also make an effort to deepen their sacrament of marriage by discovering its profound significance and what it entails. They request the help of a Spiritual Counselor, who is not merely a Spiritual Counselor, he fulfills his priestly function. He makes "Christ present as the Head of the Body" to help them pray, to educate them in their spirituality and discernment as one of the functions within teams. The priest is a strong link between the Church, the team and its members: "*It is the priests' task [...] to support the vocation of the spouses in their married and family life through various pastoral means [...], to strengthen them with kindness and patience in the midst of their difficulties and to comfort them with charity so that they can have truly radiant families.*" (*Gaudium et Spes*). The Spiritual Counselor is the man of the Word of God who helps team members to embrace it and be transformed by it. He is also the man of discernment, the one who provides both an independent view and a spiritual experience to the team that will help them to better discover the meaning of the Lord's calls.

As for him, the Spiritual Counselor is enriched by the contact with couples who are inserted in the practical life of couples, parents, in their profession and in their lay ministries. The couples and the Counselor form part of a circle of friendship and mutual cooperation. Teams are very proud of these privileged moments of exchange and friendship. And as evidenced by many Spiritual Counselors, the priest finds in a Team the benefits derived from friendship and the more direct discovery of the realities of married and family life. This collegiality is a stimulus and a support for his personal life and his pastoral activity.

Discernment is learned by exercising conjugal dialogue, pooling and sharing at the team meeting as well as during the annual retreat. The Spiritual Counselor plays there a very important role. He clarifies the Gospel texts and is actively involved in forming consciences. In the team, to quote the beautiful expression of Pope Paul VI "*He is the one who helps them to think and want justly, to act fairly.*".

Finally, the organization of the Movement takes care of the aspects of liaison, animation and diffusion. They are essential to maintain the spiritual dynamism of the couples and their testimony, while maintaining fidelity to the founding Charism. The team seeks to promote the deepening in the mystique and discern the signs of the times.



5. TEXTS TO STUDY DEPTH

The text below is an extract from the document Conjugal Spirituality and the stages of Life, prepared by the Satellite Team: Conjugal Spirituality (Chap. 7, No. 7). We also recommend that you read the Guide of the Teams of Our Lady, Chap. IV, paragraphs d), e), f), and g).

The face of Teams today

Couples who intend to live the Christian ideal of their baptism and marriage in a more practical way, feel a deep need within them, and also a call to react against the present void caused by prevailing individualism.

In the present context, couples experience every day the frailty of their good will because they suffer from isolation in a society which has become more and more pluralist and sometimes even hostile to any form of spirituality.

So they decide to form a team with other couples who share their analysis and the same desire to live this ideal. They decide to meet once a month for an evening, in the name of the risen Christ, with, when possible, a priest to help them reflect, make the right choices and commit to following the risen Jesus. They gradually discover that the team is a special place today where everyone can be recognized for their uniqueness and diversity, regardless of their age, gender, education, character, weaknesses, knowledge, social background and nationality.

These couples learn to pray with each other and for each other. They experience the power and effectiveness of mutual fellowship, when together it consists of prayer, deepening their religious knowledge, sharing their joys, their cares and sorrows, their projects and their willingness to build their human and spiritual progress.

Thanks to this extraordinary experience, they gradually discover that they are loved in a special way by Christ and His Father. They always feel they are called to love more. They try to make of the Gospel the charter of their couple life, their family life, their social and professional life. With help from the other couples of their team they commit to progress together towards this ideal life. Convinced of the graces they have received, they commit personally or as a couple to specific ministries that enable them to accomplish their mission as Christians.

To try to remain faithful to this ideal, they have adopted a particular pedagogy. They “freely require themselves” to make a special effort on some Endeavours that have been proposed: regular reading of the Gospel, daily prayer, conjugal and when possible family prayer, conjugal dialogue every month (the “sit-down”), annual retreat together or for each member of the couple, setting oneself a “rule of life”.

Couples commit themselves to firstly try out and then to live as faithfully as possible this team life, and then, to also share in the life of the Movement which is itself made of teams living in communion.

But what these married Christians receive is not to be kept for themselves, but to be given to others. That is why they not only practise material and spiritual mutual help, but at the same time they try to practise the same welcoming and generous hospitality towards all who suffer and experience difficulties in their love, and who also aspire to a real life by being recognised as children of the same Father.



Rembrandt showed us that that the Father possesses the arms of the couple. According to studies made of Rembrandt's painting, it is possible to see that the two hands of the Father correspond to a man's hand and the other to a woman's hand.

Where they are and when they can, they therefore provide a genuine ministry in the pastoral care of the couple and the family. They respond in this way to calls from the Pope, their bishop and their priests.



6. TIPS FOR REFLECTION

- Express what challenged you most in this meeting.
- Do we have in our own team the desire to pass on what we have received? Are we ready to help each other in this respect?
- What has to be improved? What can we do to better help each other and promote each one's progress?



7. THE WORD OF THE LORD

With the help of your Spiritual Counselor, choose the reading to study for this chapter that best suits your team. You can also choose a different text:



Ac 2, 42, 44 - 47; 4, 32,34-35

I Jo 4, 7-11

I Co 12, 4-11

I Co 12, 31-32



8. SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROWTH IN CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY

Choose every week one of the points of the Teams' pedagogy to study in a little more depth its mystique and usefulness, using the documents published by the Movement.



9. FINAL PRAYER

Each team can choose a different prayer, or song, or else a personal prayer made by the host couple or by another couple.

*Christ does not have hands,
He only has our hands
To do his work today;*

*Christ does not have feet,
He only has our feet
To lead people on his path;*

*Christ does not have lips,
He only has our lips
To speak of Him to people;*

*Christ does not have any help,
He only has our help
To place people at his side.*

*We are the only Bible
That people still read.
We are God's last message
Written in acts and Words*

Anonymous XIV Century

CHAPTER 8

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY



1. TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

- What is the role for a Christian couple in today's world?
- Are we aware of our evangelizing role today?
- What can we do about it?



2. INTRODUCTION

Christian life requires active participation in evangelization. Christ asked his apostles to: “*Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations...*” (Mt 28, 19). The question is to know how to do it in today's world, because traditional means no longer seem to be very convincing. On the other hand, we must recognize that our individualistic world increasingly moves away from the Church, and modern culture rejects any kind of authority coming from institutions.

Faced with this reality, a number of questions arise: would it not be self-destructive to try to adapt religion to this new culture? How can we avoid losing our Christian identity? How, with a new form of expression, can we communicate our faith without changing the essence of Christianity? And we Christian couples, what precisely will be our evangelist role?

In this Chapter we want to draw your attention to those points we consider important for each Christian couple to engage effectively in spreading the Kingdom of God. Indeed, with the Teams of Our Lady, we have had the extraordinary opportunity to experience and live conjugal spirituality supported by a community of faith (the team). This is an incomparable treasure that we cannot keep for ourselves.

Fr. Caffarel introduced his article about “The Couple Apostle” by saying that: “*The sacrament of marriage makes the couple a community not only cultural, but apostolic. This means that the Christian couple must contribute in their own irreplaceable way to the building of the Mystical Body ...*”



3. THE REALITY

Note: Here we ask you to do an exercise of discernment about the reality as you see and live it in your own country, your region, your parish, in other words there, where you

live. Try to analyze with clarity your situation, try especially to formulate everything that, within the domain of the foundations of Christian spirituality, troubles you and/or fills you with hope. To begin this reflection we offer a few points:

- In general, Christians, like non-Christians, persist in confusing the Church with the hierarchy by ignoring that it brings together all the baptized.
- Today, faith is one of several items, on the “the preference market”. We can choose a few items and leave the others: we can be a believer and at the same time non-practicing, be an atheist and be married in the Church, a believer but living in a moral relativism. This mentality is one of the most serious problems facing Christianity today: a faith without commitment, a faith separated from life.



**«Do not seek the path to happiness at the market of your preferences!
The only good direction is the one that was given to us by Christ.»**

- The younger generations are no longer educated and socialized into religion. Civil society is becoming increasingly secular. It becomes declericalised and therefore requires the Christian to witness their faith with more conviction. One is not a Christian by birth, one becomes Christian by conviction.
- The Magisterium has recognized the importance of the couple and the family in building tomorrow's world. It also recognizes the emergence of new charisms among laypeople as a manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit and as the emergence of possible new apostolates for the laity in the world today.

(Write your observations here)



4. REFLECTIONS

- **How can, Teams, as a living community of couples, give a convincing and appealing answer to the questions facing the world today?**

Today we have a situation which is not dissimilar to that experienced by the early Christian communities. The latter were immersed in an environment characterized by the predominance of a pagan culture. It is therefore no exaggeration to define our current situation as “neo-pagan”.

“According to the Latin American bishops who met in Aparecida Brazil, one can only be disciple in community (Cfr. 278d). The disciple by nature is not isolated. He cannot live out his vocation privately. Even if current culture has a strong preference for subjectivism and consumer individualism, and even if the selfish strength of the human heart seeks to live for “self”, Christ’s disciple must live in community, that is to say, in Church, as part of the Body of Christ. They are a “member of the Body of Christ” with Christ at the head and the other members forming the body.” (Col. 1,18)³³.

Evangelists described the story of Jesus’ small community with his twelve apostles. In reading the Acts of the Apostles, we see how Paul, who was expelled from the synagogues, was forced to insert himself somewhere else. First of all he went to the families of the believers and then he visited the pagan families, who transformed their homes into a place dedicated to the proclamation the Gospel. Note that Paul’s main role was not preaching but the proclamation of his personal testimony as a person identified with Christ. Paul converted the family community by transforming the pagan values, both natural and human, into Christian values, in other words, transforming simple pagan families into authentic Christian communities.

Our strategy should not then be different to that used by the early Christians: inserting ourselves in the couples and families in order to permeate their culture of evangelical values. This spreading of the Gospel cannot be heavy, or discursive, it should be “alive”. It is because of this that we need to “in-culture” the Gospel in the various fields of human life by transforming from within the consciences, cultures, customs with the strength and light of the Gospel.

³³ Mgr. Héctor Cubillos P. « The Missionary Disciple, according to the document from Aparecida ». Conference given during the First Meeting of the END of Colombia in Bogota, August 2011.

In the Guide to Teams, we can read: “*The members of the Teams of Our Lady live in today’s world. They are fully part of it and want to be the “yeast in the dough”. This is why they must constantly discern the signs of the times, in order to discover the new realities and the needs of couples today.*”

“Discerning the Signs of the Times”, is to recognize and interpret the changing aspirations and needs of women and men of our time, discovering more precisely among people of each generation, their most worrying issues, their deepest aspirations and their most frustrating despairs. It is also important to take a hard look at the events that are taking place in society. We cannot remain indifferent to these realities since we are called to be “yeast in the dough.” (Mt 13, 33).

The yeast in the dough is “minority”, which does not mean marginality! If it is good, this yeast will allow the whole mass to rise. Similarly, the salt which is a very small minority in the bread, gives it its flavor!

Members of Teams, we must be aware of the urgency and necessity for our Christian vocation to respond quickly to Christ’s call to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world and the yeast in the dough. We must be well aware that as Christian couples we are placed in the very heart of society. The family is recognized as the basic unit of society by most sociologists. We are called to bear witness to our faith, our love and our hope in this world that sails directionless in the waters of individualism. We cannot sit idly before announcing the Good News of Christian marriage to all couples, whether they are married, engaged, advocates for living together, or civilly married. We must give them the opportunity to discover Christian marriage as a way of love, happiness and holiness. This are “our people” in the words of Jean VANIER.

Let us not make our teams “nurseries of self-righteous adults” but free bodies at the service of the Church and society.

On the other hand, it is clear that the number of divorces and separations increase exponentially. These love sick are the couples who are very often left at the roadside. We cannot exclude from “our people” those couples in difficulties, the divorced and the divorced and remarried. By vocation and because of our training, we are called to go to those who can also be on their way to witness God’s tenderness and mercy as expressed by John Paul II.³⁴

In summary, we should give testimony to the fact that Christ is the only one who can give meaning to our life, both as individuals and as couples. It is by demonstrating this truth that we can effectively contribute to building the Kingdom of God in our society and become signs of the “new civilization of love!”

³⁴ The Teams Movement has a defined orientation in this regard. Teams is intended for couples engaged in the sacrament of marriage. However, the Pope’s call was not made to the Movement but to us, team members. Therefore, this support from team members can take many forms and following various initiatives. It is up to us, team members to answer them!



5. TEXTS TO STUDY IN DEPTH

- “Man and woman, united in love, are the living parabola of the divine community.”

For Fr. Caffarel, four components characterize the mission of Christian couples:

Reciprocal Sanctification

*“It is primarily with your spouse that God wants you as his collaborator! Remember that Pius XI in *Casti Connubii* wrote: “This mutual molding of husband and wife, this determined effort to perfect each other, is the primary reason of matrimony, provided matrimony be looked at not in the restricted sense as instituted for procreation.”*

The happy initiative of a young couple inspiring this spiritual care for their spouse one for the other, is therefore not a luxury. Through the sacrament of marriage, you become responsible for the sanctification of your spouse, following Christ’s example of becoming incarnate and making himself responsible for the salvation of humanity ».

So do you feel responsible for the spiritual progress of your spouse?

Procreation and children’s education

“About your procreative and educative activities, the great word of ministry should be incorporated. [...] This is a major ministry.”

“This mission, that is yours already on the natural level, was confirmed and highlighted by Christ. He has given you power and graces in order to sanctify your children. He entrusted you with the task of being witnesses and prophets to them of his saving love.”

“Your first way of contributing to the sanctification of your children is to love them with great tenderness, wanting them to develop and working with them to achieve it. Nevertheless, parents, you have to convey the Word of God to your children. Give as much importance to the education of the couple as such but also to that of your family. To lead a child to be a fully spiritual adult, the father and the mother should work together to give birth and to raise them.”

“Hear what Christ says to you: « ‘It is with you and through you, parents, that I want to multiply and develop new children for the Heavenly Father.’”

Can you give a testimony of your experience in this matter at the team meeting?

The apostolate of the couple

“You have two kinds of richness: human richness and richness of grace. Firstly, the human richness. The first source of all other richness and the most precious: your conjugal love — but it must be alive. [...]”

“The Christian couple is not satisfied just to offer their human richness, to show through them the fundamental truths: they bestow on their hosts the richness of the grace they are living. Their great spiritual richness is the presence of Christ who makes this family community a “little church” in the words of St. John Chrysostom. “When two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” said the Lord.” [...] “After this quick inventory of your human and spiritual richness, you know that we can say that the Christian couple is “an exceptionally effective instrument of apostolate.” “Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes me; and those who welcome me, welcome the one who sent me.” (Mt 10, 40).

The apostolate outside the home

« But apostolate is not only to give testimony and enlightenment, it is also a task. It is the apostolic activities that husband and wife can undertake and develop together. Some of them even require the participation of both: preparation of engaged couples, welcoming catechumens, helping the newly married, supporting couples in trouble.

You are also invited to share your experiences of apostolate in the field of family ministry.



6. TIPS FOR REFLECTION

- What have you particularly discovered in this chapter?
- Share your reflections made during your discussion as a couple.
- Jointly share the experiences that you have had in the context of your work, your neighborhood, your city, and your circle of friends.
- Consider as a team what the role of the Christian couple should be in today's de-Christianized world.



7. THE WORD OF THE LORD

With the help of your Spiritual Counselor, choose the reading to study for this chapter that best suits your team. You can also choose a different text:

Mk 16, 16-18

Jn 15, 12-17

Ac 1, 6-11

Co 7, 12-24

1Th 5, 12-22



8. SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROWTH IN SPIRITUALITY

Based on the findings of this Chapter, can you establish a rule of life that helps you to engage effectively in the evangelization of the world around you?



9. FINAL PRAYER

Each team can choose a different prayer, or song, or else a personal prayer made by the host couple or by another couple.

Prayer for Peace (St Francis of Assisi)

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon,
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light,
And where there is sadness, joy*

*Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled, as to console,
To be understood, as to understand,
To be loved, as to love
For it is in giving that we receive
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal life*

THE REVIEW MEETING

"The last meeting of the team year is a review meeting. It gives the team the opportunity to reflect and review its life openly and in a Christian spirit. It looks back on its progress during the past year and prepares for the following year."

(The Guide to Teams)



1. TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

The following proposes questions to prepare for the review meeting. We suggest you prepare for this meeting with a review of life in the spirit as suggested by the extract from the Guide above. If the Super-Regions or Attached Regions prefer to adopt a different scheme, or simply add questions they deem more appropriate or even necessary for the needs of your Teams, do not hesitate to do so.

As a couple

- ✓ What does spiritual maturity mean for you?
- ✓ Do you feel that you have progressed in your conjugal spirituality this year?
- ✓ In what area do you feel that you have made the most progress?

As a team

- ✓ How do you rate the quality of Sharing in the team as a means of progress in conjugal spirituality?
- ✓ What have you received from the other couples?
- ✓ How has the Spiritual Counselor been able to contribute to this growth?

In the Movement

- ✓ Has the Movement (Sector, Region, Province, Super-Region and ERI) offered you opportunities to meet, for formation, sessions on the Endeavors and Sharing?
- ✓ Have you taken advantage of those opportunities? How?

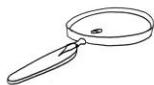


2. INTRODUCTION

When a life project between a man and a woman is born, they try to get to know themselves better to create links for greater collaboration. It is therefore clear that there will be no conjugal spirituality possible without looking for a greater intimacy with the person and message of Christ. Conjugal spirituality, like any project of love, begins with a shorter or longer period of initiation.

Loving Christ, adhering to his Gospel, represents the entrance of God into the life of a human being and thus also into the life of a couple. This entrance, does not take place as an idea but as the very real presence of a living person. Divine love can therefore participate directly in our conjugal love. That is conjugal spirituality.

Team life and especially, the team meeting, are valuable tools to grow in conjugal spirituality. We arrived at the end of this year working as a team, so it is a good opportunity to take stock of your spiritual progress as a couple and as a team.



3. THE OBJECTIVE

The team should seriously and calmly review the past year, regarding, in particular, our progress in conjugal spirituality, that is to say, in the love for Christ and adherence to His Gospel. As its name suggests, this is an evaluation and projection meeting. It concerns of course the various aspects of the life of each couple. But it focuses on evaluating the life of the team, what needs to be done to protect, strengthen and, if necessary, to correct.



4. TEXTS TO STUDY IN DEPTH

“(...) It is not my intention here to offer you an extensive examination of conscience: at home, in my parish, in my profession, in the country, in the Church; am I a parasite or a good servant? It would not be serious to address this important issue superficially. More modestly, I would like to invite each couple to question themselves: Why did we join teams? To take, or to give?

Then, I ask each team: Why did you join the Movement? Was it only to find the work themes already done, to receive a newsletter, to benefit from the experiences of others? If so, you are in the wrong place.

(...) But if your answer me: “We want to participate in the great mission undertaken by Teams of Our Lady, we want to establish the kingdom of God in our homes, to immerse holiness in the midst of the modern world and not remain a privilege



for monks, we want to train good Workers for the City, robust apostles for Christ”, then you are on the right track for your spirituality, your team will be useful to all.

(...) Being imbued with the spirit of Teams, you will have no difficulty in accepting its discipline. Your reaction will not be: that rule bothers me, I protest! But, since this obligation is useful for the smooth running of the Movement, I accept it!”

(Father Henri Caffarel - Love and Grace)

“We cannot confront the Movement – as a tenant against the owner or an employee against the employer, we need to feel like a member of a “whole”, responsible for everything, in solidarity with everyone. We cannot set ourselves apart regardless of the progress or regression of the Movement.

A living movement is a movement that is being built every day, thanks to the action of each of its members. In construction, each one takes responsibility for their own tasks, according to their particular capabilities, resources, time, generosity...

A movement declines and dies when its members abandon the mentality of “builders” to adopt a mentality of “tenants”!

All you members of Teams of Our Lady, are you contributing to building the Movement? I invite you to put this issue on the table.”

(Father Henri Caffarel - Builders or Tenants)

	5. TIPS FOR REFLECTION
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During the meeting, each couple will share what they consider especially important in their evaluation. This will allow us to deepen the progress of conjugal spirituality for the other couples and that of team life.

	6. THE WORD OF THE LORD
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With the help of your Spiritual Counselor, choose the reading to study for this chapter that best suits your team. You can also choose a different text:

Lk 13, 6-9

Lk 14, 28-33

Lk 17, 7-10

1Co 12, 4-12, 24b-27

2Co, 13, 11



7. FINAL PRAYER

Each team can choose a different prayer, or song, or else a personal prayer made by the host couple or by another couple.

*"Lord my God,
My only hope, hear me!
Do not let lassitude stop me from searching for you,
But make me seek your face ardently,
Give me the strength,
You who made me find you,
And who has given me the hope to find you more and more.
Before you are my strength and my weakness:
Keep my strength, heal my infirmity.
Before you are my knowledge and my ignorance:
There, where you have opened, receive me;
There, where you have closed, open yourself to my call,
That I may remember, understand and love you!"*

(Saint Augustine)

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