

TEAMS OF OUR LADY

CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY

AND ITS STAGES

SATELLITE TEAM: CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY

31st AUGUST 2010

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INTRODUCTION

In the last years, many authors have been interested in Conjugal Spirituality. Generally, they all recognise that father Caffarel was one of the pioneers of this discipline. Yet, before starting with a clear definition of the concept of Conjugal Spirituality, we had to refer to the spiritual theology that deals with spirituality in a more general way.

Every human being feels mysteriously drawn towards the unknown, towards the Transcendent, towards God. But this is revealed in different ways according to the age of people, their degree of spiritual maturity, their needs and the different stages in the couple and family life.

Is the access to Conjugal Spirituality open to Christian couples only? Surely not and we'll see it. But what are the conditions for a Catholic couple to be able to develop a conjugal spirituality starting from their own conjugality? Could it be their effort to understand how a human couple, following Christ's example, can serve God throughout their life in the Church and in the world?

This seems possible to us even today, when our society is living deep social, economic, cultural and religious perturbations, when the faith in God is starting to look completely out of fashion and sometimes even in contrast with the ideas of our time.

First we shall try to define the present socio-cultural and religious context, compared to the one prevailing half a century ago. Then, we shall define the human being that will be at the basis of our reflections. Afterwards, we'll go to the heart of our work: the Christian couple engaged in the sacrament of marriage, who recognises that conjugality is based on love, the supreme value. At that moment it will be possible to analyse the relation of the individual with God (spirituality) and the relation of the Catholic married couple with the Lord (conjugal spirituality). Immediately after, we'll try to define the stages of spirituality according to the age of people and the cycles of conjugal and family life. This will bring us to establish certain characteristics of conjugal spirituality. We'll show how the Teams of our Lady are a school of conjugal spirituality, which helps couples to progress towards the Lord on a path of greater sanctity of the couple.

The working method - in the équipe and jointly, typical of END, allowed us to connect different approaches to the subject we dealt with, and, even if this forced us to spend much time in harmonizing compartecipazioni, it also greatly enriched us from a personal point of view.

Limits have been fixed, for the achievement of the project as well as for text length. These limits have forced us to make choices (sometimes very difficult) in the subject to deal with more deeply and also forced us to reduce the text length, which probably made it less clear.

Having limitations concerning both the time at our disposal and the length of the text, we were compelled to make a selection (sometimes with great difficulty) of the subjects to be dealt in depth and to reduce the length of the text. This made it perhaps less clear.

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The outcome of our reflection is not intended to be a treatise on Conjugal Spirituality, but a more or less organised workshop of ideas on this topic, that could be a starting point for those willing to approach this very rich, though not enough exploited, subject.

The Satellite Team on Conjugal Spirituality

31st August 2010

CHAPTER I

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

As our reflection has to lead to the drawing up of a topic for study to enlighten future team members, we thought it important to place our work, in the most realistic possible way, in the socio-cultural and religious context of our time.

The world where we live has in fact gone through very great changes. It is completely different from the one experienced by father Caffarel and the first team members at the time of our movement's foundation. To be aware that our founder had immediately understood the necessity to analyse the main tendencies of his time, in order to better answer the needs of the Church and of the world at that exact moment is really important. As a matter of fact, he often repeated that we were not team members for ourselves, just to stay protected in our coterie. We are team members to bring faith and hope today, in a world that has lost many of its benchmarks. And, most of all, to bring the living and concrete witness of the value of the Christian marriage.

Already in 1959 father Caffarel had understood that only well-trained Christian couples, willing to shape their life on the Gospel message, could bring not only a new and enlightening message, but also an effective help to the Church and to the world.

“Much more than being a movement intended to initiate into perfection, the members of the Teams of our Lady, are called to give an apostolate of renewal and hope in the Church and the world of tomorrow.

You know that mankind is developing at a dizzy rhythm and that, according to demographers, it will double at the end of the century; you also know that priestly vocations are not multiplying at the same rhythm, on the contrary they often decrease. Tomorrow, more than today, the cooperation of lay people in the Hierarchy's apostolate will be inevitable”¹

To attempt to see it more clearly we compared two epochs: the one of the birth Equipe Notre Dame, and present times. Here, we provide to you a few trends, but you will find more details in the Annex 1 of this text.

These upheavals have taken place in several domains:

1° Authority:

While some fifty years ago, in many countries, Roman Catholic religion permeated society, after May 1968 the influence and power that the Church as an institution and the State had on society were challenged. This challenge even becomes more and more frequent.

The separation of Church and State becomes more and more clear. Laity becomes a rule in State structures and life. The trend is to place Catholicism at the same level of the other great religions.

2° Advances in science :

1 CAFFAREL, Henry, Vocation et Itinéraire des Equipes. In the “Anneau d’or”, no. 87-88, May – August 1959 – Special issue “Mille foyers à Rome”.

While some fifty years ago the advances in science were limited, even if real. Today we see an exponential development of knowledges and scientific applications in the fields of mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology and medicine, with an immediate popularization.

Nobody can foresee today what the daily texture of tomorrow life could be. We abandoned the world of forecast. Moreover, the scientists are far from being unanimous about the theories they defend. See for instance the problems related to bio-ethics and climate change.

3° Work:

In other days work was extremely available, they were the times of full employment, with a very low unemployment rate. At the time, a balance existed between working time, resting time and time dedicated to one's family. Today, due to the mondialization of economy and culture, everything is overcome by the power of money. Big industrial firms delocalize, and this results in a loss of jobs.

A great growth of unemployment can be noticed, and also a stronger and stronger pressure on personnel. There is a dishumanization of personal relationships.

Due to this deterioration of living conditions, an extremely vivid consciousness raising arises, about the urgent need to respect the person and its environment.

4° Access to knowledge and education

While in other times access to knowledge and education was reserved to privileged ones, now it is universal. Internet opens its doors to everyone, without any possibility to discern accuracy and validity of the informations given. Different cultures are no longer apart from ours; on the contrary, they are often honoured. The influence of the media on opinion has become decisive, but it does not allow us to ensure a sufficient discernment.

In other days there was a great deal of ignorance on human sexuality, which was often a subject whose different faces one did not dare deal with. Nowadays, sexual education, which was normally passed on by parents, is more often begun in schools. Due to the frequent setbacks of fertility control, it is more and more centered on contraception.

5° Marriage:

After the "baby boom" in the post-war years, a huge fall in the number of wedding must be noted. Young people marry later and later. The strong drop in the number of babies is not now sufficient to ensure the population turnover.

The wedding ceremony is increasingly often prepared by the young people themselves. It is not planned by the parents any more. But common law marriage has practically taken the place of the engagement. The danger comes from an ephemeral love more related to sentiment than to the commitment "I will be with you because I feel love for you!"

Nowadays marriage is not the origin of the couple and family any more. the institution of marriage, the role of family and fidelity are often denigrated. Couples often are made and unmade many times, at an increasingly growing pace. The children become prisoner of the system and must adapt themselves, at any cost.

"monoparental" or "reconstructed" families, where filial relationship is no longer explicit, make the children more frail: once they reach the adult age, they hesitate to bind themselves once and for all. Several new questions are set when the relationship is an homosexual one.

6° Women' life:

Until the late seventies, it did not exist but an only way to create a family, especially in the western world: marriage between a man and a woman. Once marriage opened to women the gates of sexuality, salaried job and independent housing. That allowed them to enter life. The woman has today become able to manage her fertility. She works and no longer depends from her husband economically. For these women the possibility to have a wage has set up a contradiction between their desire of personal autonomy, their openness to the outside world and marriage as it traditionally appeared.

7° Spirituality.

Marriage is no longer considered a second-class sacrament.

Several doctrine document have appeared, about the richness and beauty of christian marriage (encyclical letters, documents from the episcopal conferences, inquiries on the sexuality of the couple, documents written by laymen).

Many movements of lay spirituality appear and develop themselves. The Teachings of the Church have become conscious of the importance of the couple and family in the building of the world of tomorrow. It also recognizes the emerging of new charismas among laymen as an actual expression of the Holy Spirit and as a new possibility of apostolate in today's world.

Elaborating a conjugal spirituality. END developing in the entire world. They have a great influence on the Council, about laymen apostolate. A lay is not a second row christian any more.

8° The christian's life:

In other days one was a christian by birth. All the great stages of life, from birth to death, took place in an organized and very well structured environment. However, today, the fall in vocations and the priests' ageing do not allow this organization and this leading attitude.

In several western countries, the reliability of the Institution suffers from a transfer (often mutilated by media) of its moral doctrine. Paedophilia cases discovered among priests and religious do not help to set up this trust again.

Society, becoming more and more lay, clericalizes itself and forces the christian to be more convinced. One becomes a christian by choice and decision. The Council gave a big liberating impulse. Some Cardinals and Bishops demand a less triumphant church, giving more responsibility to laymen and looking primarily towards the poorest.

Among the young, many react against the all-present individualism: they engage themselves against injustice and they want to learn again what real love means. They aspire to live in a more open church to pass on hope in a world increasingly difficult to live in.

This analysis must not appear pessimistic. It must help us to enlighten us in our search for spirituality and push us to react staying credible. Is to the men and women of today that the Gospel must be announced. This Gospel still is a good news that must be announced "at a man's face height", as underlined by Mgr. Albert Rouet, Bishop of Potiers.

During our pilgrimage to Rome in 1970, Paul VI even defined some privileged fields of apostolate for our Movement:

"In our times, that are so hard for many, what a grace to be received 'in this little church', according to John Chrysostome's words, to enter its tenderness, to discover its motherhood, to experience its mercy, and this is so true that a Christian couple is 'the smiling and sweet face of the Church'. It is up to you to carry out this indispensable apostolate as couples, with some privileged fields of action that are the formation of engaged couples, the help to young couples and to couples who are in a critical situation".

In 1998, cardinal Danneels, addressing the ERI/SR in Maredsous, stated:

"If you are the Teams of our Lady in the pastoral of family and couples, it is for others. Be aware that you have a ministry in the Church. There is a true ministerial tie between what you do and the Church: you are somewhere the hands and the feet, the tongue and the mouth of the Church in a particular field, that of the life of families and couples. And this is perhaps the greatest reason of credibility for the Church today"

Recently, in Rome (07/03/2010), Pope Benedict XVI judged it necessary

"that there be a change of mentality inside the Church, specially with regard to lay people" thinking "that it was necessary to stop considering them only collaborators of the clergy and to start recognising them as jointly responsible for the actions of the Church. This will make it possible, though respecting the vocations and roles of everyone, to promote an engaged and mature laity and the joint responsibility of all the members of God's people".

CHAPTER II

THE HUMAN BEING

In order to well understand spirituality, and more precisely conjugal spirituality, it is very important to understand the human being. According to God's revelation, the Church teaches man's true nature and dignity. The dichotomy between spirit and body as two separate realities, each of them acting by itself and sometimes even in an antagonistic way, is forgotten. Man is no longer more soul than body. Man is a unity of body and soul. This was the Church's teaching since the beginning and also in the Vatican II Council.

2.1 The unity of spirit and body

The most adequate and richest concept of man is that of *person* as opposed to *individual*. This concept did not exist in ancient times, it was originated in the Christian world and Christianity spread it in culture.

In our time, the concept of person has been developed by personalistic philosophers, and mostly in France by Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain. He introduced the distinction between person and individual.

“As an individual, each one of us is a little fragment of a species, a part of universe, a single point in the huge concatenation of cosmic, ethnic and historical forces and influences that govern him; he is submitted to a given physical world. But each one of us is also a person and, as a person, he is not submitted to the stars. He subsists entirely on his own spiritual soul and his soul is a principle of creative unity, independence and freedom.”²

Soul and body are therefore so indissolubly connected that there is neither something completely spiritual nor something completely corporal in man.

The reality of soul and body integrate the dimension of the Spirit, who allows man to enter into relation with God. The Spirit, according to Mondoni, “is the highest moment of the human being’s self-expression”, as it is through the Spirit that he can express his spirituality and manifest his life, with intelligence and freedom, according to Jesus Christ’s spirit³.

Consequently, the whole human being is made up of his body and his soul, and is manifested by his spirit. It is through the spirit that he interprets events in the light of faith and he acts under the Holy Spirit’s impulse to create a more solid, fair and fraternal community.

According to St. Paul’s words, “May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy in every part, and keep you sound in spirit, soul and body, without fault when our Lord Jesus Christ comes”.

2.2 John Paul II’s theology of the body

Theology of the body is the title given by pope John Paul II to his 129 catecheses in public audiences. He offered the Church and the world some biblical reflections on the meaning of human corporeity, mainly with regard to sexuality and erotic attraction.

According to Christopher West, the theology of the body is the key to understand human corporeity. It also permits to better decipher the enigma of the incarnation as man and woman – that is the human being – and therefore to understand the foundations of family and conjugal spirituality more clearly.

According to pope John Paul II, it is essential to establish an authentic conjugal spirituality in order to restore family and build a culture of life. To do this, “Those who wish to fulfill their human and Christian vocation in marriage are first of all called to make this theology of the body the essence of their life and of their behaviour. The human body is, in a certain sense, a sacrament”.⁴

The bases of this Theology of the Body are as follows:⁵

a) The body: it is revelation of the mystery of God:

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- 2 Jacques MARITAIN, quoted by D. Antonio dos Reis Rodrigues – Pessoa Sociedade e Estado – Principia-2008 – p. 34.
- 3 MONDONI, Danilo. Teologia da espiritualidade Cristã. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2002, p. 86.
- 4 John Paul II, audience of 2nd April 1980
- 5 Christopher West. Op.Cit. P. 16

- "The trinitarian God is relational love in himself". Marriage is a "primordial sacrament", to be understood as a sign that really communicates the mystery of God's trinitarian love.
 - "The body, and only the body, can make visible what is invisible, the spiritual as well as the divine. It was created to transfer the hidden mystery of the eternity in God towards the visible reality of the world, being therefore its sign.
 - John Paul II wants to study the human body, not as a biological organism, but as a theology, as a "study of God". The body is not divine, but it is a "sign" of the divine mystery.
 - The body has a "bridal meaning" as it reveals man's and woman's call to become a gift for each other, a gift that is realised in their union as an "only flesh". The couple's love reflects God's trinitarian love.
 - Conjugal spirituality: it is to participate in God's love and life and share them with the world.
- b) An incarnated spirituality
- The authentic spirituality is always an incarnated spirituality;
 - The human body has a "language", inscribed by God, that proclaims not only his infinite mystery, but makes this mystery present to all of us.
- c) The authentic spirituality
- The love and union of a man and a woman – Christian marriage – has not the aim to legitimate the concupiscence of the flesh. Through the Holy Spirit's power, the spouses are called to experience a real and deep life of sexual desire, having their love as its supreme value;
 - The sexual union has the sign of the great mystery of creation and redemption. That is, this union is "sacramental". In fact, the gift Jesus has made of His body, as the expression of this complete donation, also makes the human body highly worthy and allows the analogy between the union in marriage and the one of the Christ with His Church. Conjugal spirituality implies the comprehension of the dignity of the conjugal act.
 - An authentic conjugal spirituality has to extend to all fields of human activity.

The comparison between conjugal love and Christ's love for his Church is the key to understand St. Paul's doctrine on marriage. As the Pope, we can draw many teachings from this analogy-

According to this analogy, it is clear that the wife represents the Church while the husband represents Christ. The husband loves his wife and she, in turn, loves her husband in a circularity of mutual love and service.

The conjugal union is therefore the sign (sacrament) of Christ's union to his Church. This union of Christ is the sign of the mystery of God's love, and the mystery of redemption is originated from it.

Finally, this comparison helps us to understand what is the meaning of having a body. If we have to love each other as Christ loved us, we can feel the way He loved the Church, his spouse: giving his body for her (Lk 22,19): *"This is my body, given for you"*.

2.3 Characteristics of the human person

From the unitary concept of human being it is possible to derive some characteristics of the person, and the most important among them are: singleness⁶, dignity and equality⁷, autonomy⁸, perfectibility⁹, sociability¹⁰, domination of nature¹¹.

Anyway, as far as spirituality is concerned, the most important characteristic is the fact that the person is oriented towards God: the transcendence of the person implies that man is not confined in his limits; by natural inclination, he is projected outside himself and gets in touch with other beings, first of all with God, to complete and improve himself. Created by God, it is through Him that he gets his last achievement. This is the reason why he has a great inclination towards God, a desire that is never satisfied.

It's God who gives meaning to human life; if there was not God, there would be no eternity and our life would end with our death. The meaning of the existence of man would only be given by that existence itself: to exist for nothing, without aim, towards nothingness! It's the eternal God's existence that allows not to end up with insufficient, desperate and contradictory "projects of life".

6 Each person is unique, not reproducible, irreplaceable and, consequently, can't be considered as either a simple link in a chain or an isolated piece in the mechanism of a system.

7 It's man's dignity that justifies the equality of all men. Each man is basically equal to another, for a number of reasons: because he takes part in the same rational nature, in the same origin, because he goes toward the same temporal and eternal destiny, finally because each one is unique and not reproducible.

8 The person is not a part in a whole, but "somebody" who exists by himself and in himself. The acts carried out by each one are acts that really belong to him. Man is defined and decides by himself, freely, choosing his own ways. God gave him the freedom to decide. Autonomy is therefore the basis of freedom.

9 The person is an incomplete being. This means that a person always lacks something and looks for it. Between what a person "is" at a certain moment and God's original plan for him/her, there is a space to be covered. This has to be done through a continuing improvement in the exercise of freedom.

10 "And God created man to his own image; to the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (Gn 1,27). This society of man and woman is the main expression of the communion of persons. Because it is in the deep nature of persons to be social beings. No person can live and develop his/her qualities without relationships with others.

11 The commandment to submit the earth manifests itself through work, that is essential because it is the person's way to promote progress, therefore cooperating with God's creative action.

CHAPTER III

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

To think of marriage in a personalistic perspective allows an important development in moral theology, as it is less rigoristic and less contractual.

The personalistic option is shown in “Gaudium et Spes”, from number 47 to 52. Two theological views are present in this document: the innovating view, that speaks of marriage as an alliance, and the conservative view, that still considers marriage as a contract. The connection between these two theological approaches resulted in a change in the general orientation of marriage morale, in favour of the personalistic option.

Consequently, in the personalistic understanding, the old idea of marriage ethics based on the so-called aims of marriage has been modified: love, that is the main characteristic of marriage, is the greatest grace and the heart of marriage; the idea of the supremacy of procreation over the unitive aspects of sexuality is rejected. Harmony and integration are emphasised.

Marriage “is an intimate conjugal community of life and love based on ‘the alliance of the spouses’” (GS 48). This doctrine has just been confirmed by pope Benedict XVI who added the social character of marriage:

“What constitutes marriage is the personal love of the spouses, but as accepted and ordered by the community. And whatever attempt to found marriage, or its Christian characteristics of unity and indissolubility, starting only from personal love, without referring to the social or legal character of man, is destined to fail”¹²

Marriage is therefore a personal reality and also a social reality. Christian couples have then to impress the social character of marriage in customs and laws.

The actors of the marriage alliance are a man and a woman who are baptised and therefore free to commit themselves in marriage. They freely express their consent without any constraint. This exchange of consent between the spouses is an indispensable element for the sacrament of marriage. Without, there is no Christian marriage.

Here are some characteristics of marriage:

- A human act of mutual gift and reception;
- An act of will by each of the spouses;
- The means that ties the spouses to make them become an only flesh;
- The affirmation of an alliance that has human and Christian bases;
- A reciprocal opening to mutual help;
- It makes conjugal love exclusive and faithful;
- It gives a unique expression of human love, a reflection of God’s love, a strong love till the utmost consequences.

¹² RATZINGER, quoted by Marciano Vidal s.j. “Le Mariage – Entre l’idéal chrétien et la fragilité humaine” Editorial Perpétuo Socorro. Vila Nova de Gaia, septembre 2008, p. Ratzinger, p. 102.

On the other hand, to say that marriage between Christians is a sacrament *“means that the procreator order of the relationship man/woman, embodied in marriage, is no longer a neutral or simply earthly reality, but a reality that becomes part of God’s alliance with His people (...) therefore the sacrament is not a reality that is added to marriage but it is itself the marriage. For those who live it in faith, and to the extent that they live it, marriage is a sacrament”*¹³.

The sacramental dimension of the Christian’s life means that each “sacramental” object becomes a visible sign of the invisible God, and each community of baptized people is, in turn, a sign of the Merciful Father’s presence. For those who need them, the definitions are in catechism books and in doctrinal manuals. Marriage, being a sacrament, is called to be a visible sign of God’s love, of Christ’s gift and of the Church’s unity. It is this reality that the Movement wants to popularise, accompany, favour and strengthen; it is with this conviction that the teams base conjugal spirituality in the sacrament of marriage.

CHAPTER IV

CONJUGALITY

Conjugality is the situation of life produced by the mutual commitment of a man and a woman, starting from their mutual love. Conjugality exists apart from any religious belief, any range of values or duration of the contract. As for us, from now on we shall develop the Christian conjugality of couples who are part of the Catholic Church and follow its values.

The conjugality that is characteristic of marriage is expressed following the structure of the gift: the gift of a sexed person to another person of different sex, with the acceptance of this person as if he/she was his/her own body¹⁴.

More particularly for Catholic people, conjugality has some very specific aspects that are connected to the sacrament of their marriage, with all what they imply: faith, indissolubility, devotion, Christian concept of love as charity, etc.

Conjugal ethics – in the perspective of conjugal spirituality – means the construction of a mutual behaviour between the spouses, that can create the conditions for a greater deepening of their marriage, family and spiritual life.

1. Consequences of conjugality

Conjugality influences all aspects of the couple's life that are concerned with ethics and morale, children education, social relations... Following the different stages of life, the way of life, the values and habits that are adopted, conjugality has to evolve and adapt itself.

Conjugality implies that couples have to organise their time keeping in mind the need of their spouses and children; they can no longer organise their time in the same recreational, cultural, charity or religious activities, as when they were single. Generosity, in both money and time, is a virtue that has to be managed according to family responsibilities and with the agreement of both spouses.

Christian conjugality, through the sacrament, has the transcendental meaning of being the symbol of God's alliance with His people, the reflection of His trinitarian love and Christ's gift to His Church.

The virtues of tenderness, goodness, sweetness, patience, enounced in chapter 3 of the letter to the Colossians, will be always practised by the couple, by mutual consent and after common discernment. The inner life of prayer of the couple will be a subject for conjugal mutual help, keeping in mind the personality of each of the spouses and his/her rhythms, conjugal and family prayer and pastoral commitments. But it is not essential that the inner life of prayer is somehow "formatted",

The spirituality of each one is essentially personal. To acquire spiritual conjugality it is not necessary to fuse two spiritualities into an only mould. Each one has his/her conscience and his/her freedom. Everything is built in mutual gift. Love is the supreme value. Harmony has to be looked for and not submission or depersonalisation.

14 VIDAL, Marciano. Op.cit. pp. 127-128

2. Love, supreme value of conjugality

Love is the first value, that summarise and is the origin and the destin of all other values. In the meantime, it is the most important characteristic of conjugality.

The Christian definition of love, expressed by pope Benedict XVI in his Encyclical “*Deus caritas est*” (nos. 5 and 6), is intrinsically connected to the concept of unity of the human being: «actually, eros and agape (...) never let them separate one from each other. The more these two forms of love, also in different dimensions, find their just unity in the unique reality of love, the more true nature of love in general fulfils itself». ¹⁵ If one of them is completely detached from the other, love becomes a real caricature.

Conjugal love lies in the will to do what is good for one’s spouse and in completely giving oneself to the other, without forgetting the human being’s carnal dimension that has its own demands too. “*To recognise the role of the body in the union of a man and a woman is essential; to despise it on the pretext of a greater spirituality, as well as to exalt it or to give up integrating its demands, is not an authentically Christian reaction*”¹⁶. Sympathy, friendship, tenderness, attraction for each other are present in conjugal love. They favour the perception of what is good for the other, arouse the will of doing it, in conclusion to love him/her. But true conjugal love goes beyond feelings, it is a decision.

Then, to love implies action. Who wants to love without acting, remaining passive, doing nothing for the object of his/her love would only give a caricature of love. Unfortunately this is what is often popularised in contemporary culture.

Nowadays, in our secularised civilisation, other concepts, that are more or less near to love, are utilised: respect is mentioned, and this is good. Rights are also mentioned (of man, of children, of family, of animals etc.), it is a pity that, thinking of rights, our rights are more thought of than others’ rights. Solidarity is mentioned, and this is good when it is practised in a completely unselfish way (with no political, economic, syndical, personal interests).

But here is the definition of Christian love that Jesus taught us: love as a gift of oneself, love as abnegation, love as charity, love as mercy. In Christian terms, it would then be called “Charity”.

Deus Caritas Est! – God is Love! – Love is therefore the supreme value.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 127-128

¹⁶ CAFFAREL, Henry. LA COMMUNION CHARNELLE. Lettre Mensuelle Des Equipes Notre-Dame. Septembre-octobre 1971.

CHAPTER FIVE

SPIRITUALITY

We will now address the concept of spirituality and its complement, conjugal spirituality.

Above all, is important to distinguish between two concept that usually are quite linked: spiritual theology and spirituality.

Theology as a science has various branches, among which spiritual theology is quite recent. We can list, among the others:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogmatic theology, which exposes and deepens the content of the revelation and faith • Moral theology, which analyzes human behaviour and presents their rules.
- spiritual theology is the subject regarding spirituality. It is divided in:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ascetical theology, which deals with the practices that allow us to advance on the way of perfection - mystical theology, which is about extraordinary states in which God manifests Himself in an inexpressible way

Spirituality is a concrete way of living and experience spiritual life. We can find in history different cultural expressions of spirituality in different ages and different places concerning the way of being a person or group of people. In this context, can exist various schools of spirituality or simply “spiritualities”.

Naturally, spirituality can animate people of other cultures and religions, and even people without a religion. If spirituality can exist in these people, we can conclude that:

- spirituality is inherent in every human being
- in this sense spirituality exists in every religion
- christian spirituality, therefore, exists in every christian religion

1. Christian spirituality

Here is the definition of christian spirituality given by Father Caffarel: *“Spirituality”, in general, is the “science concerning christian life and the ways leading to its full fulfilment, integral christian life is not only worship, praise, asceticism, effort of interior life. It is service to God, in the place assigned by Him, in the family, in the job, and in the City...”*¹⁷.

A more modern definition is given by MONDONI. The latter conceives spirituality as a *“set of principles and practices that characterize the life of a group of people who relates to the divine, to the transcendental, to life in the Spirit. What one does with the things he believes in, the different ways in which we experience this transcendence, the means according to which life is conceived and lived”*¹⁸.

The concept of human being which has been developed in the second chapter of this study shows a very important aspect of spirituality, it involves the whole person, body, soul and spirit. Is necessary to affirm that a spirituality relating itself to the spirit alone results in a disincarnate spiritualism which

17 CAFFAREL, Henri. « UN MOT SUSPECT ». Lettre Mensuelle Des Équipes Notre-Dame. III^e Anno, n° 8 - Giugno 1950.
 18 MONDINI, Op. Cit., p. 18

must be refused. The angelism (?) of the ones who escape the world under the pretext of the worship of God must be avoided¹⁹. The ideas presented below, therefore, will be based on an integral conception of the human being²⁰.

According to Mondoni, christian spirituality represents:

- life in the Spirit, or christian life in itself (to point towards God, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit)
- the different ways of experiencing and creating the life in Christ
- the vital reality building itself on the gift of grace
- a growing communion with God, in which the force of the Holy Spirit brings to a gradual spiritualization, making the christian capable of receiving and knowing the secrets of God.
- is a theological reality

Christian spirituality, therefore, shows us christian life itself, in which God is the first and the last. Spiritual life in Christianity moves from faith in the person of Jesus. To adhere to his word means God entering in the life of the human being, not as an idea but as a living person. However there is no christian spirituality without a cooperation with Christ and the community of believers.

According to ESPEJA, another contemporary author, christian spirituality means living according to the spirit of Christ, recreating and realizing in human life itself and in a certain historical situation the fundamental attitudes the motivations and the behaviour of Jesus Christ.²¹

VON BALTHASAR, as for him, shows that the Gospel must be taken as law and proof of every spirituality in the Church. For him, the revelation is the key to define spirituality. He argues that “in the Church, the Gospel is the standard and the touchstone of all the spirituality”. So, every human form of spirituality has roots in the revelation of a God “of “trinitary” and “unitary” love. For christians, no spirituality can be authentic being disconnected from Christ’s revelation²².

To finish, here there are some features of christian life, presented by Flavio Cavalca de Castro, one of Teams' spiritual counsellor priests. First of all, he asks himself a question: “If spirituality has as a purpose to bring to the perfection of christian life, what does this christian life consist in?”²³ What does “grow in christian life” mean?

- Becoming more participative in the divine life
- Developing to their best our skills, i. e. the gifts the Lord gave us (parable of the Talents/of the Pounds)
- To grow in holiness, i. e. be led by the callings of God (taking even the risk to go in deep waters)

19 However, we point out that the forms of enclosure of some religious orders do not mean escaping the world, but withdrawal and contemplation in order to consecrate oneself to prayer and intercession.

20 We remind that Man is not made up of two contradictory or even diverging elements. He is a body animated by a soul, being this soul incarnated. Man is a whole, an unity. Every form of dualism pretending that the creature made by god in His own image is composed by two juxtaposed realities (not to say opposed) must be rejected”. (CAFFAREL, Henri. LA CHAIR ET L'ESPRIT DANS LE MARIAGE. In L'anneau d'Or. Numero 1 – 1945 – p. 9)

21 ESPEJA, Jesús. Espiritualidade Cristã. Petrópolis (RJ): Vozes, 1994, p. 28.

22 SHELDRAKE, Philip. Espiritualidade e Teologia: vida cristã e fé trinitária. São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 2005, p.91

23 CASTRO, Flávio Cavalca. Retiro sobre espiritualidade conjugal. Aparecida, pp. 2-4.

- Being every time more imbued with Christ's ideas, with his way of thinking and his way of acting.
- To be submissive to God's will, which is never an imposition
- To point always towards good, justice, a restriction-free love
- To develop the qualities God put into every man and every woman
- To let God's love lead our body and spirit
- To follow moral needs and religious obligations

2. Conjugal spirituality (CS)

CS is a new face of Christian spirituality. Given that spirituality is the act of living into practice christian perfection in the different situations and states of life, we can say that for christian couples there is a spirituality of their own.

Many writers have devoted themselves to develop the concept of CS , but in this chapter we will privilege father Caffarel's thought. As his ideas will be exposed, we will comment hem in order to make clear or develop his thought

*"CS is the art of living in marriage the evangelic ideal that Christ proposes to all his disciples"²⁴
 "How to live in a christian way the family and conjugal realities? How to live in marriage all the needs of christian life? Members of the Equipas Notre Dame, you know we have chosen this second interpretation"²⁵. Now, "the science and art of sanctifying one's self in and by the marriage, that's conjugal spirituality"²⁶.*

CS incarnates itself in the ordinary and daily life of the couple. So it is not about barring normal obligation of the couples' life. It's about living ordinary life in Christ's way.

In the word "spirituality" we summarize a life mainly pointed at spiritual values, the values which do not die, the values announced in Jesus's gospel. The word spirituality comprehends the idea of a conscious continuous and systematic journey, which looks for the perfection of christian life, developing at their best the gifts that the Lord gave us. In this context, CS represents the act of living marriage in search of well-being and transcendence which orientates the couple beyond the simply temporal horizons and which satisfies the dreams of the spirit, the heart and the flesh searching for perfection in life and conjugal life.²⁷

Esther and Marcelo AZEVEDO, a Brazilian couple in END, presented some ideas on CS that can be resumed as follows:²⁸

- spirituality is everything concerning spiritual life
- spirituality is deeply incarnated, has roots in the daily life, lived in the frame of the common everyday life. It cannot be reduced to a complex of rites and practices far away from concrete life.

24 CAFFAREL, Henri. « VIENS ET SUIS-MOI ». LETTRE MENSUELLE DES ÉQUIPES NOTRE-DAME. XVI^o anno n. 2 – novembre 1962. [8. 112]

25 CAFFAREL, Henri. VOCATION ET ITINÉRAIRE DES ÉQUIPES NOTRE-DAME. In L'anneau d'or. Numero 87-88 – Maggio – Agosto 1959 – Numero speciale « Mille foyers à Rome » P. 239 a 256. [6 – p. 263]

26 CAFFAREL, Henri. LETTRE MENSUELLE DES ÉQUIPES NOTRE-DAME – XX^o anno – n. 7 – aprile 1967. [10.144] (seguito)

27 DE CASTRO, Flavio. Casal em Diálogo. Aparecida, SP. Editora Santuario, 2007, pp. 37-38.

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

- spirituality is a journey which leads to God and is pushed by the Spirit, through the entirety of the realities we live in.
- spirituality is not made up of the sum of two spiritualities, the husband's and the wife's
- the the married ones' spirituality does not exclude in any way the spirituality of each member of the couple
- CS is a journey to reach sanctity with the force of grace, in the daily existence of the couple and in their life ruled by love
- To practice CS means living the sacramental action, i. e. make the sacrament act through gestures, words and special acts related to natural love which links the couple
- CS is essentially a sacramental existence

"Married people, you have little time to study, to deepen your faith - some among you suffer from it, some of you profit from it, too happy of such a good pretext, that exempts them from an hard search. You forget that there are not only books which speak about God; you have, in you, a Bible in images, but you do not flip through it! I mean, all this family realities which are yours. Conjugal love, fatherhood, motherhood, childhood, the house. The most explicit things God found to make himself known. To make jealous those who do not marry!"²⁹

An essential element of CS is also the christian in-depth study of the body, from a theological and anthropological point of view, so that one can progress through maturity in love.

2.1 The basis of conjugal spirituality

In this work, following END tradition, we will focus only on CS among catholics who gave themselves the sacrament of marriage.

"At the root of CS there is an appeal from Christ "We, married people, our vocation is to go to Christ together, the one and the other, the one with the other, the one through the other"³⁰

"The root of Christian love" also states Father Caffarel "is not in human heart. It is in God. To the married people who want to learn to love the more there is no good advice but to look for God, to love God, to be one with God, to let him have all the place..."³¹ God is at the root of love, but He is also at its end. Love comes from God, goes to God. God is the alpha and omega of love"

CS comes from the grace received through the sacralization of marriage which represents a particular or specific grace aimed to improve the spouses' love and to fortify their indissoluble unity. This grace, moreover, contributes to the mutual sanctification during the entire conjugal life and also to reciprocal acceptance and the children's education³².

In the sacrament of marriage there is a double alliance. the alliance between the spouses which give to themselves the sacrament and Christ's alliance with the spouses. Here is the "great mystery" which St. Paul speaks of in regard to marriage, and, at the same time, the great gift by God to the couple,

29 CAFFAREL Henry. VOTRE BIBLE EN IMAGES. L'Anneau d'Or. Numero 77 – settembre – ottobre 1957 – p. 362.

30 CAFFAREL, Henri. POUR UNE SPIRITUALITÉ DU CHRÉTIEN MARIÉ. Op. Cit., pp. 249-250

31 CAFFAREL, Henri. LOTISSEMENTS. In L'anneau d'or. Numero 35– settembre – octobre 1950 – pp. 310 a 311 [1- p.4]

32 CALSING, Mariola et Éliseu. SACRAMENTO DO MATRIMÔNIO E ESPIRITUALIDADE CONJUGAL. Brasília, 12 e 13 aprile, 2008.

God, the faithful par excellence, engages himself with the couple, and the latter can commit herself to (can rely on) His faithful love thanks to Christ's presence and help.³³

According to "Gaudium and Spes":

"Christian spouses, in order to accomplish worthily the duties related to their state, are strengthened and consecrated by a special sacrament. Accomplishing their conjugal and family mission with the force of the sacrament, permeated by Christ's spirit that soaks their entire life of faith, hope and love they come more and more to their personal perfection and mutual sanctification: in this way they contribute together to glorify God" (GS 48,2).

Living CS allows them to do God's will, and becomes for them a bond of love, a place of happiness and a journey of sanctity. It is what allows them to realize their mission and their ministry in the couple's and the family's specific apostolate, in the Church and in the world.

2.2 The goal of Conjugal Spirituality: sanctity

"We are called to sanctity, but a saint is not above all, as everyone imagine him, a sort of champion who accomplishes valiances of virtue, spiritual feats. He is above all a man seduced by God. And which gives to God his entire life. You are called to sanctity. And it's into and by the marriage that you must approach to it."³⁴

Sanctity is not only a goal but an approach to life, a way of behaving day by day, following evangelical values as fullness of christian life and experience of love. It means to answer Christ's call "Come and follow me". "So, is clear to everyone that the appeal to the fullness of christian life, and the perfection of love is addressed to all, those who believe in Christ, whatever their state and their way of living".³⁵

Sanctity is related to likeness with God, i. e. to the willingness that allows grace to make the invitation possible. The image of God that is a free gift to manhood, becomes real when the couple lets the Holy Spirit act freely in its life. The text in Mt 5 shows the "volte-face" made by Jesus. The Old Testament speaks of "sanctity", whereas Jesus speaks about perfection. The idea is to move from exteriority (sanctity following the law) to interiority (perfection letting God act inside us), in a process that makes us look like God.

We don't think anymore that sanctity is possible only for some categories of privileged ones and that there are first an second-class faithfuls. Laymen have the possibility to reach the highnesses of sanctity and apostolate, too.

"The contemporary disciple of Christ will save his soul not by escaping the world but, on the contrary acting in the world to develop at their best the divine potentialities in the creation"³⁶.

33 ALVARADO, Constanza et Alberto. EL SACRAMENTO DEL MATRIMONIO COMO EXPERIENCIA DE FE, DE AMOR, DE FELICIDAD Y DE SANTIDAD. Bogotá, 2008.

34 CAFFAREL, Henri. SÉDUITS PAR DIEU. Lettre Mensuelle des Équipes Notre-Dame. XVI° anno – n. 10 – luglio 1963.

35 Lumen Gentium, n. 40.

36 DE FIORES e anche GUARDINI, 1939 – citato da DE FIORES, op. Cit., pp. 25-26.

So, the need of a new means to live spirituality arises: “Today, to be saint is not enough; a sanctity fit to the current times is needed, a new sanctity, also unprecedented”³⁷.

The Novelty that became accessible to laymen, living the values the needs and the beauty of the gospel, incarnating theme in their lives embedded in the world.

Cidinha and Igar FEHR, who in the past have been R.C. International Responsible Team – ERI make some important suggestions on CS as a way to sanctity:³⁸

-“spirituality is the means through which we try to know, to interpret and to understand God’s will on our lives and which should be our answer on the road to sanctity. It is the orientation we give to our life, starting from the values revealed by Jesus Christ.

- CS orients life starting from the fact of being two. The life of each member of the couple, in the daily life, in their relationship and mainly in their relation with God brings the mark of marriage.

- True spirituality comprehends every facet of life. It integrates in spiritual life all the elements that are scattered in a number of situations , activities, influences, of common, family, conjugal, professional life, even if the spouses conflict sometimes with each other.

2.3 The means of conjugal spirituality

To set off for spiritual life, it is necessary to know and to flow the means that are essential to nourish our nature, limited in space and time. in this work we just want to focus attention on these means. to grow in spirituality, it is necessary to put oneself in a permanent prayer attitude and to keep watch on one’s religious education.

For believers an essential element to a spiritual education is to adopt a life of prayer. And consequently to put in practice to reach a coherence of faith and life.

2.3.1 The three means suggested by father Caffarel

According to him the three means to make CS flourish are: the Eucharist, listening to the word of God, and prayer

- The Eucharist

The gift of Jesus’s body as an expression of total offering, says a contemporary author, makes extremely worthy the human body and allows to compare the union in marriage to the one of Christ and His church. The sacrament of marriage, symbol of God’s union with the spouses is linked and resembles to the gift of Christ in the Eucharist. There is a true marriage of these two sacraments.

37 WEIL, 1939. Citato da DE FIORES, Op. Cit., p. 26

38 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.

“My conclusion will be brief: just a sentence. Marriage is Christ’s admirable invention so that the Eucharist is lived in two.”³⁹

The sacrament of confession is important as a source of all graces, mercies and God’s forgiveness. It is also a marvellous instrument for CS for it opens paths to reconciliation and abnegation in the couple during the search of their balance and coherence of faith and life.

-The Word of God

“Christ’s word in the Gospel is not only teaching, commandment, confession of love, but also an act. It operates. This voice I listen at when I read the Gospel, is the same which placated the raging storm, which healed from leprosy, the same which raised the dead, which forgave sins, which generated sons of God”⁴⁰.

There are many sources and methods to discern God’s voice, but all must be based on the word of God, for it is the source of the revelation God makes of Himself and of the way of life that allows a man to make his way towards Him, giving in such a way a sense to human life

“For this reason you must refuse all that makes filthy, all wickedness that is left in you, to receive humbly the Word of God that has been sown in you, it can save you. Put the word in practice, do not content yourself of listening at it. For listening at the word without putting it in practice, is to be like a man who looks at himself in a mirror and soon after goes away forgetting how he looked like. On the contrary, the man who looks at the perfect law, the one of freedom, and remains in it, who does not listen at it to forget it but practices it in his deeds, will be happy to act like this.” (St. James 1, 21-25)

-The prayer

The prayer is a date of love with God, which I am invited to. Christian faith is not a set of philosophical or religious beliefs, is joining Christ’s person, who leads us to the Father in the breath of the Spirit. To pray, will therefore mean to go meet Christ. Prayer is a date. A tete à tete I’m invited at.”⁴¹

2.3.2 Father Bernard Olivier’s specifications on prayer

-Three definitions of prayer

1. *“Every elevation of the soul towards God - Not any, no matter what, pious thinking but a contact with God through what is in us the deepest and most personal, which we call soul”*

39 CAFFAREL, Henri. MARIAGE ET EUCHARISTIE. In L’Anneau d’Or – le mariage, route vers dieu. Numero speciale 117-118 – maggio - agosto 1964 – p. 242 – 265.

40 CAFFAREL, Henri. LETTRE MENSUELLE DES ÉQUIPES NOTRE-DAME. XVII^e anno – n. 4 – gennaio 1964.

41 Cette citation est inspirée du parcours proposé par la SR France-Suisse-Luxembourg à la session de vacances de Massabielle - 28 juillet au 3 août 2002 – sur les enseignements du Père Caffarel.

2. A “medical” definition. According to Doctor Alexis Carrel: it is the breathe of the soul. “Prayer has the same function that breathing in physical life”

3. The best definition of prayer in my opinion is the one of Ex. 33,4: “Yahvé spoke with Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend”. Notice the three pointed elements.

a) it is a meeting, a dialogue, a face-to-face discussion. certainly, it has to be made in faith, we are not yet in the vision...

b) God is the one who speaks the first. That’s Him who has interesting things to say. We have mainly to be silent and to listen. After that we could speak, we could answer...

c) It is a friendship relation. between two being that love each other, a big amount of words is not necessary, they understand each other without having to spell things out. That is true indeed, but we must yet say that we love each other. There is a beautiful Chinese proverb that says: “Before you speak, make sure that what you have to say is most beautiful than silence”.

To live this form, of prayer I think that two conditions are essential:

- To establish a contact- to assure communication

- To speak with God “in second person”. To address Him in a direct way and not simply move some pious ideas about God.

-Meditation

There are different methods according to different spiritual masters - St. Ignatius and his Exercises, Saint Theresa of Avila, St. Francis of Sales, Saint Catherine of Siena, Father Caffarel. Precious methods, fit for all likings. I am going to propose to you one among them, very simple and accessible to every one: my own.

Here there are the different moment I propose:

0. Point zero: To choose the right time and place is important. Examples: Silence and peacefulness, presence of the Holy Sacrament when we can, there are people of the morning and people of the evening...

1. To place oneself in a state of prayer, in an attitude of prayer, physically and spiritually...

2. To choose a subject for prayer, in order not to spend prayer time looking for a seducing subject. A passage from the Gospels, a parable, a simple word, an idea (mercy, evangelical poverty...)

3. To reflect upon the subject - This is the key point- what does this parable, this word mean? What sense makes it to me? How can it help me to change my life? We use this idea, we examine it. we can help ourselves with technical notes, with commentaries. But this is not a study or a biblical interpretation, it is a prayer, a dialogue with God...

4. A conclusion in two acts a) to carry an idea which one is going to keep in his to think at it and live with it. b) to adopt a practical resolution, something going to change our life a little.

-The contemplative prayer

Opposite to meditation, contemplative prayer is not a discursive work . It is not a systematic reflection. Here is God who makes all. We are beyond any word. A simple look. we look at god. We contemplate God. As when we are caught by the beauty of a painting.”⁴²

Coming back to Father Caffarel, he states that for the spouses conjugal prayer is the vehicle for the graces of the sacrament of marriage.

“Conjugal prayer is an extension of our sacrament of marriage. One of the reasons of conjugal prayer is to maintain in us the grace of marriage” “It is a bit as if, every evening, we would pronounce again the sacramental yes”. It is true, conjugal prayer is an important moment of the sacrament of marriage. Married Christians sometimes wonder how to draw the graces of their sacrament. The eucharist, the Confession, they know what to do in order to have resort to their own graces, but what about marriage? One should not be hesitant to answer that conjugal prayer is a privileged means to draw from the sacrament of marriage the graces it has in store for the spouses. If every christian household were convinced about the importance of conjugal prayer, if in all these households conjugal prayer were living, there would be in the world a wonderful rise of joy, love and grace”.⁴³

If every spouse can have a personal prayer, private moments of meditation and contemplation, he/she can also, once married, have moments of family and conjugal prayer; reading the Word and meditation can therefore be shared with one’s spouse. What a richness comes from this for prayer and the spiritual union of the spouses!

As every facet of life in common, conjugality demands to find an harmony in prayer life, too.

If the spouses have different levels in their prayer life, or have different perceptions of their access to prayer, to find a path to harmonization through conjugal dialogue. We notice, therefore, that harmony does not mean egalitarianism. It must be a careful, intelligent and loving way in order that each one helps the other to progress towards sanctity.

2.3.2 On the other means

Other means that can help us growing in spirituality. That these means do not make up an exhaustive list, is clear. Every person, every couple, can discover new ways.

-Forgiveness

“There is no conjugal bond standing without forgiveness. To forgive is not "to erase oneself". It is not forgetting everything about something, it is not restraining resentment, to let someone destroy us staying in silence. True forgiveness, as the book of Leviticus suggests (19,17) implies telling the other person the evil he did us. For-give-ness is "giving something letting the offense alone", is to renew trust, desire to recreate a relationship. It requires hope. It requires the heart to speak and make

42 OLIVIER, Bernard OP. Sur l’oraison (sur la prière et la prière au carré). Document dactylographique.

43 CAFFAREL, Henry. LA PRIERE CONJUGALE – Compte rendu d’Enquête- LETTRE MENSUELLE DES ÉQUIPES NOTRE-DAME. Numéro spécial – mars 1962.

things clear. It is one of the most difficult human acts that exist, as asking for forgiveness also is. The race of the Holy Spirit will not be redundant in it”.

-Education

To the spouses is recommended to adopt and maintain an attitude of willing fullness and inquiry, not only as regards the deepening of the faith, but also concerning the different facets of their family, social, pastoral and professional life. All the other means listed above would be meaningless if they won't lead to be concretely lived. Most of all, one must not fear to take the risk of engaging oneself to take responsibilities in the Movement, in the Church and on the world. Is from this taking the risk, from this state of poverty that “the spirit of your Father will speak in you” and that we will be reflections of the Father for all who criticize us and for those who ignore all about the Good News of marriage.

-Participation to pastoral organizations or movements in the Church

Belonging to an organization helps oneself to motivate himself to education, makes sharing experiences and points of view possible. Integrated in a group, we can also discern in a better way with others the way of living and incarnating our spirituality. Joining initiation, spirituality or action movements allows us to help spreading in a better way evangelical values. Take for instance the END movement which, with its pedagogy and its organization, aids équipes of families which meet in order to help each other and pray. It allows, in this way, these couples to discover their conjugal spirituality and progress in it.

-Discernment

As important as spirituality is discernment. Not to leave one's own life flow through the chance of events and circumstances and advance on the spiritual way, we have got to create a discerning attitude. Starting from one's own situation, the one of the couple, and from what one has the ambition to become in life in general and on spiritual life in particular it is worth taking some time to make an analysis of the signs and to be able to discern the ways through which the Spirit wants to lead us. This can be done, in particular, through the examination of conscience, meditation, conjugal dialogue, education and the advice and opinions of other people able to help us in this matter. Every means proposed for CS needs to be nurtured and developed ideally in the couple.

2.4 Responsibilities in conjugal spirituality

“We must affirm that the sacrament of marriage gives to the couple a role in the Church and so an indisputable and original apostolic mission. An irreplaceable one. The couple has a specific apostolate to exercise and no one can replace it”⁴⁴

The mission of a Christian in the Church, i. e. to work in the Lord's vineyard, being active in the mission proposed to us by Jesus Christ.

- To be Church, means to be a people following the Gospel
- To be Church means to be an instrument for the instauration of the Reign of God among men

44 CAFFAREL, Henri. LE SACERDOCE DU FOYER. In L'Anneau d'Or - Numero speciale 111-112 – Maggio – Agosto 1963 --p. 225 a 240 –

- To be Church means to live one's own faith in Christ in an incarnated way

The promptness of the couple in the apostolate has been underlined many times by the teachings of the Church. First of all by the apostolical exhortation *Christi Fideles Laici* on the vocation and mission of laymen in the church and in the world. It affirms:

*"The couple and family are the first place for the social commitment of lay faithfuls. It is a commitment that cannot be taken in a good way unless being persuaded of the unique and irreplaceable value represented by family in the development of the society and the Church itself."*⁴⁵

CS persistently invites couples to become Jesus Christ's disciples-missionaries, i. e. being bearers of the Good News of marriage among humanity, and not sad, downhearted, impatient or anxious evangelizers.⁴⁶

In father Caffarel's thought, four specific element characterize this mission of christian couples⁴⁷

-Mutual sanctification

"It is a mission, a divine mission. By the sacrament of marriage you make yourself responsible of the sanctification of your spouse as Christ who incarnated Himself and made Himself responsible of the humanity's salvation".

- Procreation and children education

"Concerning your procreative and educational activities is better to recall the great word of ministry. In fact, procreating and presenting your children to the Church so that it give them birth in the life of grace; through the transmission of faith to the ones to whom you have transmitted life, you notably cooperate to the intensive and extensive growth of the mystical body: this is a prominent ministry."

- Outside home apostolate

Apostolate is not only a witness and a radiance, it is also a task. It is among the apostolical activities that the husband and wife can start and continue together. some also request that both devote to them: fiancés' education, welcoming catechumens, helping young and broken-up families".

Father Caffarel does not hesitate to tell couples that apostolate is an eminent and irreplaceable facet of their apostolical mission. The same appeal comes from Cardinal Danneels:

45 JEAN PAUL II. Exhortation Apostolique *Christi fideles Laici*. Chapitre III – La famille, premier espace de l'engagement social. Version éditée par le Service Diocésain de Formation Permanent des Hautes Alpes. (www.FDPO5.com), p. 31.

46 Document d'Aparecida, en conclusion de la Cinquième Conférence Général de l'Episcopat Latino-Américain et des Caraïbes (2007).

47 CAFFAREL, Henri. LE FOYER APÔTRE. L'Anneau d'Or – Le mariage, ce grand Sacrement. Numéro spécial 111-112 – Mai – Août 1963 -pages 257 à 271 -

“I would like to tell you what I expect from Equipes Notre Dame: that they faithfully accomplish their pastoral ministry of the Gospel, that there are, in some way, the hands, feet, mouth and tongue the heart of the Church in its pastoral ministry for families and couples. Now, every ministry, being it the priest’s or someone else’s, always means trying to live not for oneself but for others. If I am a bishop, it is for others. If I am a priest, it is for others. And if you are the Equipes Notre Dame, it is for others. As saint Paul says, “We do not live for ourselves, we live for others” because Christ did the same”⁴⁸.

- Hospitality

In the heart of the house, ‘a cell of the Church’, the guest meets Christ. That’s why exercising hospitality is true apostolate, it can also be said that it is the specific apostolate of the christian household. ‘Those who welcome you, welcome me, and who welcomes me, welcomes the one that sent me’ (Mt, 10,40)”⁴⁹.

Even if this is not the place to delve into this specific hospitality mission, it should be studied more in its concrete aspects. For today christian couples and families are at the core of practice of hospitality and welcome.

“ ‘Practice hospitality carefully’ (St Paul, Romans 12,13).

“So, we have to say that providentially, a christian house is a shelter on the way of the church? And that here, just like children, a non-believer takes a first contact with it, the sinner experiences its mercy, the poor and the abandoned discover its motherhood. All those who would have never pointed towards priesthood and sacraments are gently led to them.”⁵⁰

48 CAFFAREL, Henri. UNE CONFERENCE. LETTRE MENSUELLE DES ÉQUIPES NOTRE-DAME. XV° anno – n. 9 – giugno 1962.

49 DANNEELS, Godfried Card. Discours aux END à Bruxelles, sett. 1987

50 CAFFAREL, Henri. Le Foyer Apôtre. In: – L’Anneau d’Or – Le mariage, ce grand Sacrement. Numero speciale 111-112 – Maggio – Agosto 1963

CHAPTER SIX

THE STAGES OF CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY

Many authors writing on spiritual theology think that is advisable to deal with spirituality depending on different “states of life” (priestly, religious, lay) and different stages of life.

With “stages of life” they mean the different forms of human existence, the characteristic ways during the different times of its march going from birth to death. These ways of life are many particular ways of feeling, looking at and act in the world.

Spirituality is in a close relationship with the “stages of life” because it essentially develops through experience, i. e. what is common to all men. This changes depending on the contingencies of life, the events that help to build or destroy the values established or experienced day by day, in the relation with other people in the world.

In every stage of life, nevertheless, a value and a sense to daily life must be given. Daily life is considered as the world (in other words, “the tissue of the relations with men and things) in which every person integrates himself/herself and watches. It is the dialogue between the individual and the reality surrounding him, what he experiences in this reality and the transformation he/she operates in it”.⁵¹

That being so, we have to understand every person’s spiritual experience, and, in the case of lay people, after the declericalization of sancity, we have to understand how and in what circumstances it can be reached. As a consequence, spiritual life is always a concrete (real) man’s life, who has his story, his abilities, his limitations and whose education depends on many elements that occur during the different stages of his life.

On the other hand, being CS first of all a religious phenomenon developing itself according to some spiritual values chosen by the couple, is clear that the stages of its evolution correspond to the way in which every couple voluntarily adopted these values which lead it gradually towards CS. Is possible to forecast towards a spiritual life according to the cycles of the couple and the christian family life.

1. The ages of a person

In respect to person, Jacques Gautier⁵² proposed the psychological and spiritual ages of person:

1. Childhood and the consciousness of love (spirituality already exists in the child)
2. Adolescence and the quest for meaning (is insofar as one learns to love, that he/she builds up himself/herself as a person)
3. the thirties and the welcome of life (in this age, man wants to take his time to deepen the desire to love even if work takes all the space. The woman revises the choices on her career and maternity, opens herself to God’s project on her);
4. the forties and the crisis of desire (This is time to balance one's life according to the deep desire which is

51 RIZZI, Armido. “O homem espiritual, hoje”. In: GOFFI, Tullo & SECONDI, Bruno. *Problemas e Perspectivas de Espiritualidade*. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1992, p. 149.

52 GAUTHIER, Jacques, lay and family man, professor and poet, is from Québec. He dealt with life stages in two of his books: « La crise de la quarantaine », Le Sarmant-Fayard, Paris, 1999. More recently: « Les défis de la soixantaine », Presses de la Renaissance, Paris, 2009. This summary has been made from his most recent book, chapter 7, pp. 111-128.

the vital impuls of human beings...It's still necessary to give it a name, to open it to God's will on oneself) 5. The fifties and the force of a second inspiration (it will be the most productive stage of his life. He begins fruitful years with the assurance of a second inspiration and the feeling of a greater freedom to act. The woman nurtures more her talents, expresses her ambitions, deepens her beliefs) 6. The sixties and the way of interiority(the adult, in an advanced age pays a greater attention to its conjugal and family life. The spouses having lived together for so many years have learnt to know, accept and respect each other. The desire of harmony and tenderness grows with love. 7.Old age and the approach of death (Oldness is the age of assessments. It's time to integrate our story, past present and future and open it to death with no false shame. for a believer, old age is the time to wait for God as the one who vigils waits for dawn and to accept that the task of our life is left unaccomplished).

Different stages do exist, which are linked in a very close way to spiritual needs of the couples. These needs change not only with age and life stages but also according to education received, the grade of religious knowledge, the grade of maturity of faith, the spiritual experience one has made, the problems faced, the questions that are posed, and the particular spiritual expectations of these couples.

2. Stages in the life of the couple

Many authors, especially in the field of psychology, have dealt with the phenomenon of “conjugalit ” and of the tages in family and couple life. Among them, psychologist Jean marc Lessard has devoted a work to this theme.⁵³

He starts from the definition of couple “*A man and a woman making a project of life in common and durable*”. In this way, this definition distinguishes the “couple from every other association of people whose aim is not life in common. The length of the relationship is also important. There are people that establish a project of life for their pleasure only, their project, being not long-lasting can hardly receive the name of “couple”, whereas there are others among them whose project implies a relatively long space of time and coexistence of the two people implies a mutual effort to achieve the arrangements and the changes to make.

This dynamics can be declined in different stage in the life of the couple that can be considered as “moments of growth” by analogy with the individual development.

The stages described by this author are the following:

a. the original scenery

This regards the entire period preceding the beginning of life in two. It is the “raw material” from which the couple builds itself. Each person brings to the project of life in common his/her own story making partly the texture of each personality. The two stories, woven together will picture the portrait of the couple. The first stage, so, lies in making an inventory of this inheritance.

b. romance

53 LESARD, Jean-Marc. *Le couple d'une  tape   l'autre*.  ditions Paulines & M diaspaul. Montreal, 1994, pp. 11-18.

It is the first period of life in two in the strict sense of the world. Partners feel that they are important in the eyes of their spouse. This awareness is the background of their existence and it is constantly nursed by evident actions from both parts. This stage has a variable duration depending on couples: it lasts two to seven years. For couples in the current situation we should talk of beginning from the moment when the two partners are meeting each other seriously with a more or less explicit project of life in common

c. reality

It happens when partners realize that the image they have made up of their partner is different from the one he/she presents them now. This statement brings first of all a disillusion, and then expresses itself in demands for change, fruitless attempts to restore the situation. This stage is characterized by some sort of comeback to reality. It happens after 2 to 7 years of life in two.

d. Stability

This step represents a pause in the dynamic élan of the couples' life. It represents a period of internalization, a time of renewed calm in the life of the couple after the effervescence in the period of the struggle for power. The partners profit from this stage to integrate the changes made during the previous period. Finally, it offers the opportunity of a beneficial interiorization for the person itself and for the couple.

e. Commitment

The commitment stage is the one of the concretization and the accomplishment of the reflections or decisions made at the previous stage. The personal consciousness raising made during the period of stability and the acceptance and refusal of the other have shown some paths for growth that one must now adopt or refuse. This represents the center of the commitment stage and normally comes around the forties (from 40 to 50) in life in two or also after 15/20 years of life in two. Several authors speak about the commitment stage as the one of the "mitan" (sic) of life.

f. Co-creation

Is the stage par excellence in which the possibility of being at the service of the others is offered to the couple. This, nevertheless, does not mean in any way to drop the service offered to others during the previous stages. It underlines instead the moment in which more conditions are together to invite the couple to engage on the way of service to the community. This stage occurs between 45 and 65 years of age of the couple and after around 20 or 25 years of life in common.

Such are the 3 stages described by Lessard, on which he concludes: "Each of these stages characterizes itself for a kind of particular functioning which is its own. Each stage occurs in a certain moment of the life of the couple and it does not seem possible to skip a step or live them in a different order from the one described above. In other words, the order of each of these stages is invariable, the arrival of each new stage is also approximately predictable from some signs.

Add, in the end, that every overcome stage represents a step in the growth of the couple. Behaviours belonging to close stages of this journey can characterize a couple before it decides to finally cross the

threshold. So this flexibility does not narrow the way in a hard way, but allows an happy articulation through the entire process.”

3. The cycles or stages of conjugal-family life

The notion of cycle of family life has been taken from sociology and implies the idea according to which, as time goes by, both the couple and the family must pass through a series of predicted and predictable stages, separated by transitions also predictable.

Every stage is marked by a change:

- in family members (birth, death, leaving home etc.)
- in social relationships
- in values and beliefs
- in the parents' role
- in the geogerafical areas occupied (change of residence)
- in professional activities
- in spiritual experience

To understand and analyze the cycle of conjugal-family life compared to CS because the latter is connected to structural changes that occur in conjugal life.

So, the cycle of family life is the fundamental field for human development, where the life cycle of people is hold from an ontological point of view.

family as a matrix of its members' identity:

- the emotional unit from birth to death
- the operational field of the forming process (of values, ethics, religion, spirituality, etc.);
- it determines the mode of interaction of its members with the world;
- it meets the fundamental needs of its members

It must be considered that families and couples grow in many different ways because their members are in a continuous evolution, both biological and psychological, or also experience evolution in other fields (professional, educational, cultural). This evolution, adapted to every stage of the life circle is defined or determined by values and social beliefs that provide the norms through which children are brought up, and thati is a result of the maturing of the couple.

See the attached table in which all that has just been analyzed in this section is resumed: “A person's ages of life, the stages or cycles of the christian family and couple, represent good references, elaborated using studies made by experts. Their analysis and use sould take into consideration each particular case of every couple and every family and has to be done with an attitude of discernment, in a conjugal dialogue and with common sense.

4. Living conjugal spirituality during the entire conjugal life

What characterizes the sacrament of marriage is not the ceremony, but conjugal life. Consequently, it is a sacrament that lasts, not the time of a liturgy, but a whole life. In a certain way “through the sacrament of marriage, , life becomes a sacrament”.⁵⁴

In this context one of the great challenges of CS is not only to initiate to a christian life the couple, but to come along with it during every stage of conjugal life, and to complete this journey with spiritual experiences , so that they can mark the points of a life project that make, of this spiritual journey, a way along which God comes with the couple with His plan of infinite love.

This growth in CS is obtained only in faith and with the help of the Spirit of God transmits itself permanently with the most diverse means and the most unexpected circumstances.

This “new way of being” in the Church means living in search for sanctity expressed by father Caffarel’s words:

“It is well evident that the married Cristians will think that perfection is not made for them if they think it lies only in the sacrifices to which religious commit through the three vows. It is necessary to dissipate this widespread misunderstanding. And to show that the essence of perfection stands in love. Not in whatever love, but in the love by which the man loves God because of His infinite love and its perfections, and the neighbour because of God (see 1 Jn 3,16) until the total gift of oneself (see 1 Jn 3,16). ‘Love is Law in its fullness’ ”⁵⁵

As a consequence the Christian couple has its way to develop spiritually, according to the cycle of its conjugal and family life. In other words, the couple needs a particular spirituality that has to develop thanks to its consecration by the sacrament of marriage.

54 AZEVEDO, Ester & Luiz Marcello. A Espiritualidade do Casal: temas de um retiro espiritual. Aparecida (SP): Editora Santuário, p. 63.

55 CAFFAREL, Henri. Présentation des Équipes à Jean XXIII, N° 4. In : Jean et Annick Allemand. Op. Cit., p. 51.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE EQUIPES NOTRE DAME, SCHOOL OF CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY

The Equipes Notre Dame, composed of couples that make together the project of living more concretely the christian ideal of their Baptism and marriage, show that they are “*a school of christian life*” where people comes to be initiated to christian life, *a lab* of spirituality for married christians.

1. END are a charisma given to the church

END are nowadays widespread in the entire world (10.992 équipes, 122.532 members; 70 countries)⁵⁶. They have been recognized by Pope John Paul II from April, 19, 1992 as “private law association of faithfuls” within the lay christian movements. Through their members they bring a precious testimony in the world and in the Church, and they provide an important pastoral work in couples and families. We can consider that END are a true charisma given by God to the church.

Father Caffarel himself admitted it:

*Today, after 40 years, ... I think: there was something else in addition to a good idea, there was else in addition to enthusiasm, that this encounter was different from an accidental encounter, that Providence and the Holy Spirit were there in some way*⁵⁷.

END also have their own charisma: conjugal Spirituality. What is essential in the gift (charisma) God gave to END is to propose CS to families to walk towards sanctity. All the rest in the movement is an help: “So, I am not afraid to say, the *raison d’être* of the Movement, its goal is to bring its members to know CS and live on it”⁵⁸

2. The équipes Notre Dame, living communities of couples

In the document “What is an Equipe Notre Dame”, it can be read: “*An Equipe Notre Dame is not a simple human community, it meets ‘in the name of Christ’ and wants to help its members to progress in God’s love and in the neighbor’s love, to answer in a better way to Christ’s call*”⁵⁹

According to father Caffarel an équipe is a community of faith , i. e. a little church, given some conditions:

*“To meet in the faith, to break up with the things you are devoted to, unite with Christ by fraternal love, listen at Christ, present through His word, answer to Christ by personal prayer and equipe prayer (act of grace, of praise, of demand).”*⁶⁰

Nevertheless équipe meeting is only one of the strong moments in équipe life. This life continues in a permanent and indefinite way. Permanence is one of the fundamental features of a community of faith: permanence has its roots in the reciprocal gift between his members and iis preciseliy this that

56 END International. Statistics 1 gennaio 2010.

57 CAFFAREL, Henri. “Le Charisme Fondateur”. Lecture in Chantilly, il 3 maggio

58 CAFFAREL, Henri. LETTRE MENSUELLE DES ÉQUIPES NOTRE-DAME – XX° anno – n. 7 – aprile 1967.

59 END, « Qu’est-ce qu’une Équipe Notre-Dame ? » September 1976.

60 CAFFAREL, Henri. “VIVRE EN ECCLESIA”. Lecture at the Foyers de Liaison –January 19-20, 1957. Same lecture in São Paulo – Brésil, luglio 1957, pp. 9 e ss.

makes the difference with a simple “group” that frequently meets willing to reach a definite goal. Once reached tis goal, the group looses its sense.

The community of faith has also a definite goal . Given the inaccessible nature of its object in its fullness, it is necessary to extend it in time. This goal is not anything but the sanctity of its members, according to the words of Benedict XVI, it is the *“permanent effort we must make to shape our image following in this the Son of God”*⁶¹.

The équipe, community of faith, reaches its full maturity “when, pushed by the Spirit of Christ, the équipe sends its members in the world to reveal this love”⁶².

A community of faith does not exist without “compassion” for the other, without gift to the other, in the spirit of the parable of the Good Samaritan. It loses its sense if it remains closed within itself. Its raison d’être stands in its commitment in the world. In fact, Christ, in His love, has given His life for the whole world and not for a single people.

There is a point Father Caffarel unfailingly stressed:

*“Equipes must not be nurseries for adults... Their member mus always be committed in every field”*⁶³ *“Why have I joined the Equipes? To take, or to give?”*⁶⁴ *“You do not seem to me concerned enough to invent your equipe life”*⁶⁵.

Members of the Equipes Notre Dame, as baptized people, together with all the other baptized people in the world integrate the great community of communities that is the universal church. The END movement, as for it, is an active community of communities of faith inside the church with its own charisma. As a consequence, families in the équipes, as couples joined by the sacrament of marriage are biulders of history on the basis of love seen according to God’s plan.

3. What its pedagogy is

There is a close relation between pedagogy in the END and their organization, beteween CS and spiriyual progress of the couples. All the pedagogy and organization in END have as a purpose tio help the household to build their life project giving a key place in their life to prayer, to conjugal dialogue and mutual help of the spousesc and the équipe. Equipe life requires to consider personal decisions and (to couples) to make loyal efforts of conversion during a gradual journey.

First of all, we must specify that the initiation to END pedagogy has to be done through seduction, so, is through the path of shared love, through the discoveries, the life experiences, that this is made, so not obeying blindly, through constraints and exigences based on rigid principles. The entire pedagogy must be based on graduality. The households are initiated to the life of Christ to the inner prayer and to spiritual sharing, considering that the sharing of experiences is essential.

The three pillars of END pedagogy are: the rules of life, the obligations, the equipe life (including equipe meetings). They have as a goal to help households to create three fundamental attitudes: a

61 BENOÎT XVI, during the general audience on wednesday, september 7th 2005,.

62 END, «Qu’est-ce qu’une Équipe Notre-Dame?» September 1976.

63 CAFFAREL, Henri. GARDERIES DES ADULTES. Lettre mensuelle”, June, 1948.

64 CAFFAREL, Henri. SPIRITUALITE ACCOMMODATRICE. Lettre mensuelle”, dicembre, 1948.

65 CAFFAREL, Henri. INNOVER. Lettre mensuelle, marzo, 1949.

consistent search of God's will, a search of the truth on themselves, and the experience in meeting and communion.

One can not know spirituality without conjugal prayer or personal prayer. In the pedagogy of the equipes prayer is present in the three pillars: in the rules of life prayer is suggested as personal prayer, meditation, education, asceticism, and attending the sacraments. In the six obligations, the first three concern prayer; in the monthly meetings, after the reading of the text of the Scripture, the couples pray giving a personal response to the Word of God and then make a brief prayer of praise, of request or of thanksgiving.

Discernment, the other essential part of every well-incarnated spirituality is also present in the three pillars: in the obligations starting from conjugal dialogue, presented in the END pedagogy as the "duty of sitting-down" and the annual retreat. In the monthly meeting, the moments of general sharing and meal also offer moments for discernment. The mutual aid practised among team members can also bring a great help to discernment.

The sense of progress which is essential to CS considered as a journey to sanctity is given, through the obligations, from the rule of life. This consists in fixing concrete objectives of progress that are reviewed every month by each spouse and in the meeting during the sharing on the obligations.

Families joining the END have the opportunity to live in a CS school: school of gradual progress in prayer, in dialogue, in mutual help, in discernment on the application and incarnation of the evangelical values in their personal, conjugal, family, professional and pastoral life.⁶⁶

4. The role of the Spiritual Counsellor (SC) in the path of CS of couples

For an analysis of his role, to trace his mission and functions in an Equipe Notre dame is needed. These functions are the following:

- *Help the families to live fully their baptism being consecrated by the sacrament of marriage.*
- *Reveal the gifts of the Holy Spirit, helping at the same time the spiritual discernment in order to take pertinent orientations of life, according to the specific function of marriage.*
- *Being minister of the Word of God to make the community progress in faith. Giving explanations in the light of the Gospel and advise in order to orient well the life of a person, of a couple, of the family*

⁶⁶ (Young) couples admit that joining END has allowed them to progress in their lives. The main facts which confirm this idea can be resumed as follows:

- Growth in the couple, greater willingness in practising charity, better tolerance, greater respect of the others, more love, more attention towards the others, greater perseverance, greater understanding and patience, better tenderness and faith in God.

- One learns to get over difficulties, to improve communication, reflection and the dialogue in the couple who tries to improve conjugal spirituality

- It is a chance of improvement as a person

- Discovery, with other couples, of the richness of sharing

- Discovery, to break the routine, that also exists "a time" for the couple.

- Discovery that END pedagogy is a tool to improve communication: the "dovere di sedersi" reveals itself a very useful tool for an examination of their lives.

Feeling that ENDS are like a great family and at the same time a source of happiness (END - EQUIPE

SATÉLLITE : JEUNES COUPLES-. Les jeunes couples des END aujourd'hui. Quelle est sa réalité ? Septembre, 2009, p. 23)

- Help the couple to do of its life an “eucharestia” through the union at Christ’s sacrifice to the Father
- Help to understand better the topic for study and adapt them to daily life
- Help the couple to recognize its belonging to a concrete community and open it to the needs and the dynamics of the Church.

The SC must therefore come along with, advise and help the couple to live these realities and to grow in its spirituality. He is truly called to be the shepherd, the prophet and the priest, the advisor, the friend, the spiritual companion. Now, is the couple in particular that can invite the SA to share his path, his process, and to discern the direction to follow to reach Conjugal Spirituality.

Those who have chosen a life of christian marriage and have accepted, as a fundamental element, to seek a christian conjugal spirituality have also found in the END a way and a method fit for their desires. They have also had the opportunity to meet priests willing to go along with them in this option.

Is Pope Paul VI who has described in an admirable way the role of the spiritual advisor in END:

*“Dear sons, chaplains of the Equipes Notre Dame. during the days you help them “walk in the light” (see 1 Jn 1,7), to think in a right way, i. e. to appreciate their behaviour in the truth, to have a right will, i. e. to orient, as responsible men, their will towards good; to act righteously i. e. to gradually put their life, through the alea of the existence, in accord with this ideal of christian marriage they pursue”.*⁶⁷

In reference to this speech, father Caffarel made the following statement:

*“The pope asks chaplains advising the families to understand them: that they respect the spouses’ conscience, i. e. that they do not present the moral rule as an injunction, but nonetheless that they do not resign to see the spouses thinking an willing falsely, that they have, so, the concern of educating and nurturing consciences. that they help married Christians to understand the rules formulated by the Church: they are nothing but the law of the growth of a love tending to a complete human and christian fulfilment”.*⁶⁸

5. The life of the couple and the evolution of its conjugal spirituality

Father Caffarel asked himself a question: “Our équipes are a movement of initiation to christian life in marriage or a perfection movement?” Then he added: “My conviction is clear: our équipes must be at the same time initiation movement and perfection movement”. This reflection implies, on the one hand, the belief of the founder about the vocation of the END movement as a means in the service of christian perfection to couples through CS, central goal of the movement. On the other hand, the dynamic and progressive vision of CS. there is a start, and there is a purpose.

Pedagogy in the END is made to help couples to initiate themselves to Christian life and progress in CS. This is not acquired in a spontaneous way: joining the school of CS of ENDS, requires, from the husband and the wife, to realize an effort of the will, and to adopt an attitude of mutual help to begin

67 Paul VI, Discours aux Équipes Notre-Dame, Roma, may 4th 1970. In: Jean et Annick ALLEMAND. Op. Cit. p, 126.

68 CAFFAREL Henry. Notes du P. Caffarel N° 34. In: Jean et Annick. Op.Cit, p, 129.

an evolutionary and continuous process. This means that there can be many phases in the evolution of the couple's spirituality (that's what we dealt with in the previous chapter), phases linked not only to the person's age and the years of marriage, but also to the cycles or stages of the spiritual life in the couple and even to the stage of spiritual evolution of each person. This obviously means that follow under general terms the stages of life, nevertheless, the person's spirituality or the couple's, can freely progress trying to get to higher states of their adhesion to Christ.

Every kind of spirituality has its own pedagogy. END spirituality proposes an original and particular pedagogy for christian married couples. It consists, in a first moment, of the progressive discovery in the *équipe*, of the extraordinary positive resources. In a second moment, thanks to the practice of prayer, to the sharing of the Word, also thanks to efforts made in complete freedom with a will of encounter, mutual help and communion, it allows every couple in the *équipe* to progress completely towards a truer, more deep and more communicative happiness. The whole experience brings to the commitment of these couples in the paste of the Church and of the world as a new yeast who regenerates today's bread and can give hope again to the wounded in the couple and in the family.

The END movement offers to the couple a privileged space to head for CS, adding another fundamental element: mutual help practised with a group of couples which share the same ideal: to strive for CS. These couples are joined by a priest who helps them as a spiritual advisor.

6. The face of the Equipes Notre Dame today

Couples that conceive the project to live more concretely the christian ideal of their baptism and marriage, because they deeply feel in them, and also something like a call to react up against the present void caused by the surrounding individualism.

But, in the present context, they experiment every day the frailty of their good will for they suffer from isolation in a society which has become more and more pluralist and sometimes even hostile to whatever form of spirituality.

Then they decide to form an *équipe* with other couples that 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 good choices and commit following this risen Jesus. They gradually discover that the *équipe* is today a privileged place where everyone can be recognized in his/her singularity and his/her diversity, whatever each one's age, sex, education, character, weaknesses, knowledge, social background and nationality are.

These couples learn to pray the one with the other and the one for the other. They experience the power and effectiveness of fraternal mutual love, when it comes to pray, deepen their religious knowledges, to share their joy, their concerns, their sorrows, their projects and their will to build their human and spiritual progresses.

Thanks to this extraordinary experience, they gradually discover to be loved in a particular 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, of their family life, of their social and professional life. With some help from the other couples of their *équipe* they commit to progress together towards this life ideal. Convinced about the graces they received, they commit personally or as a couple in concrete apostolates that allow them to accomplish their mission as christians.

To try to stay faithful to this ideal, they adopted a particular pedagogy “they impose themselves in full freedom” to especially make an effort on some obligations that have been proposed them. regular attending of the Gospel, daily prayer, conjugal and when possible family prayer, conjugal dialogue every month (duty of sitting-down), annual retreat together or for each member of the couple, to fix a rule of life.

Families commit themselves first to experiment and then to live as loyally as possible this *équipe* life and so, also to share the life of the movement which is itself made of *équipes* 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 practise not only mutual help, material and spiritual, but they try to practise at the same time the same welcoming and generous hospitality towards all who suffer and experience difficulties in their love, and also aspire to a true life, being recognised as sons of the same Father.

Where they are and when they can, they assure in this way a true ministry in the couple and family pastoral. They answer in such a way to the appeals of the Pope, their bishop and priests.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This work has demanded us much energy and many researchs. it does not represent in any way a complete treatise on the subject. Maybe it will contribute to prepare a little the ground bringing some elements for reflection. But these would deserve to be deepened, and above all yto bed made clear and richer.

Despite that, here there are the themes we believe have to remain well present or have to be dealt with more deeply because they have a great importance for CS in the future.

The socio-cultural and religious context

The world in which we live today is in a ferment. Our frame of social, economical, cultural and religious life is completely upset. This revolution is far from being completed. Nobody is able to give new reference points that are credible for the young couples of tomorrow. that is why a great effort must be made so that our movement can adapt itself to the needs of the new generations.

The human being

Even if it is a doctrine that has been made explicit during the second Vaticane Council and that has been recently confirmed by Pope Benedict XVI in the encyclical letter “Deus Caritas Est”, it is necessary to make the conception according to which man is not more soul than body. Man is a unity of body and soul. This antropological principle is the key to undertstand in their full extent the concepts of “spirituality” and “conjugal spirituality”.

The Theology of the Body by John Paul II

We believe that the in-depth study of these Pope’s catechesis will bring key development and updates both for Spiritual theology and the living of CS.

Given that there are people that study this in-depth examination, the Movement could usefully organize in different geographical zones some lectures given by these experts to disclose and spread these concepts and so encouraging their in depth-study. It would allow us to update our knowledge on what we believe to be a revolution in theology.

The sacrament of marriage

The sacrament of marriage is lived in faith during the whole life of the couple and it is the basis of conjugal spirituality. Is on this belief that he END base the conjugal spirituality in the sacrament of marriage.

Today a certain disposition exists, to belittle the importance of the sacrament, o simply to relativize it. END must make an effort to deepen, in doctrine, the faith and the particular graces of marriage, so that today’s church and équipe members in particular manage to know and live in a better way this great richness.

Conjugality

The fact of living in a couple causes extremely important situations in people' life: behaviours, decisions, choices, priorities, time, spirituality, ecc. To live well this new situation in its fullness and duration, it request an adaptation that should not be entrusted to chance, but it could be very well studied, reflected upon and adapted.

This theme certainly requires a theoretical study, but has also to be enriched with a very great part of testimonies, examples and experience sharing. For these testimonies of concrete life END couples can give an important collaboration to its study and deepening.

Spiritual theology and spirituality

The difference between spiritual theology and spirituality seems us important. The first one is a scientific subject and the second represent a practical means of living christian life, i. e. a life in the spirit, according to the practices of life of Jesus Christ. Is in the latter context that conjugal spirituality is spread and lived in the Equipes Notre Dame.

In what theological context must we analyze this spirituality lived by the means of the pedagogy and mystique of the END? Is it specific of the END movement?

Nevertheless, looking at some theology textbooks, above all the most recent, that have particularly stressed reflection on spirituality, some doubts have begun to arise, and that brings us to the necessity of making more in-depth studies on this subject. In this sense it seems important to us to delve into, by the Movement, these reflection that are primary and maybe without enough theological consistency.

Spirituality

People from other cultures and religion can have a spirituality, and even people without a religion can have a spirituality that allows them to hang and adapt their lives to an idea or a supernatural belief. Nevertheless, we note that spiritual life in christianism starts from the person of Jesus. To adhere to his Word means the entry of God in the life of the human being, not as an idea but as a living person's presence.

Conjugal spirituality

father Caffarel in an editorial in June 1950, has been clear when he affirmed that the word "spiritual" creates various problems. Addressing to *équipiers*, he stated "without any doubt, it has to be well defined what the word spirituality means".

It is true that we must not seek any misunderstandings in the matter of its meaning, above all when it has to do with conjugal spirituality, which represents the heart of our belonging to the Movement of the *équipes Notre Dame*. May be has been mainly the conjugal spirituality that has attracted couples towards the Movement, because their desire was to grow in the christian spirituality and in a condition of a christian couple that has received the sacrament of marriage.

is the same Father Caffarel that has defined conjugal spirituality as "the art of living in marriage the evangelical ideal that Christ proposes to all His disciples".

From all that has been exposed in chapters III and V, can be noticed the close bond existing between the sacrament of marriage and conjugal spirituality, which is at the core of the charisma of the Movement. This means that the spouses live in the faith the alliance of Christ with the couple and that, starting from this supernatural reality they receive the peculiar graces of the sacrament to develop their conjugal spirituality.

This bond (mystery, would say Saint Paul) must be explained, taught but above all lived by the *équipiers*. Spiritual retreats are a privileged time to become conscious in a better way, to understand and to be encouraged to follow this path. It seems important to us to establish a scheme of a spiritual retreat with a content fitting to this goal.

Hospitality

It is a fundamental pillar of a true CS and that deserved a better development. We believe that in a world so full of messages, everytime and everywhere, in which people live at an allucinating pace, the most effective apostolate is the one of the example and selfless welcome in which people can share their goods, their ways of live, in short, their values.

END members must pay a great attention to the appeals of the last popes on the need to welcome “into the little church” the ones who need the most God’s mercy. An apostolate of family for which the fiances’ education, the help to the young families, the aid to households in a quandary, the split-up people, divorced and divorced and remarried represent the privileged fields: “May they find again on their road some witnesses of God’s tenderness and mercy”⁶⁹.

Forgiveness

Being at the root of every love and so of every spirituality we are very sorry we had not had the time to develop this question. It is a real gap in our work for it is a key point in the path of every couple willing to live the evangelical ideal in and through their marriage. True love integrates the frailty, the failures, the wounds and the suffering; love must therefore push us to become beings of compassion becoming conscious of our frailty.

The stages of conjugal spirituality

Despite the conjugal spirituality being in a close relation with the “stages of life”, being first of all a religious phenomenon developing according to some spiritual values adopted by the couple and certainly inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is well evident that the stages of its evolution correspond to the way in which every couple voluntarily accepted these values and adopted the different ways which bring it gradually towards CS. This means that it is not possible to set clear stages or quite linear of an evolution of CS.

Three ages seems to us to ask for a wholly particular task.

In the first place young couples at present living in a world without any reference point, or instead that has modified its reference points. Humanity nowadays faces in fact tricky issues that did not arise precedently but that appear today to be fundamental for their future. These young people have today just a religious education and an extremely defective knowledge of the Gospel. What are their questions, their problems, their expectations?⁷⁰

And at the same time what are the questions, problems and expectations of those in charge of the Church, of the ENDS and all those who want to communicate to these young people the Good News of Gospel and marriage?

In the second place, the couples reaching the retirement age: they are a very large number today. They have mainly got the control of their time and they gained an experience that could be so useful. It could not be asked them to be more active and creative cooperating actively to the pastoral of the couple and of the family?

69 GIOVANNI PAOLO II, Allocuzione del Papa alle END. Roma, 20 gennaio 2003. N° 7.

70 The beautiful work of the satellite team on today’s young couples can guide and help us!

In the third place, the couples that are close to God's vision. they have much to tell us. How to adapt the spirituality and activity of the Movement to their needs?

We just mention the subject, but are not there, in these three dimensions, many initiatives to create?

The END movement, school of CS

In our work we believe we have well explained how the Movement and its pedagogy can be considered as a truer school of CS. We believe that now, more than ever before it is essential to maintain an attractive aspect of the movement and its pedagogy.

We think that the genius of Father Caffarel with the first équipes had been to create a common dynamics of discovery; to make perceive, then understand the richnesses of marriage, neither imposing nor teaching but discovering them together throughout the days, on the simple realities of the life of these couples and of their family life. These realities can be enlightened with a daily contact with the Gospel and even shared through conjugal dialogue and mutual human and spiritual help with the other households of the équipe. The driving force of this gradual discovery belongs to the field of seduction, not at all at the field of obligation. Is this seduction that pushes the households not to stay enclosed in a phase of initiation to spiritual values and therefore to enter the evolutive logic of a conjugal spirituality. This path does not follow a straight line whose stages are determined or even predetermined. This path is made in the total freedom of our faults and of the forgiveness of a father that endlessly lifts us up, sets us on our feet and pushes us to act as His son did.

This path of progress certainly is demanding with no concessions to "facilitisms" and to "relativism". Nevertheless, what seduces is not the lack of a rule, is the love of the spouses that pushes them to progress in Christ's footsteps! It is because we love that we become demanding for themselves giving one's self to the other. It is because of all this that "nobody is forced to enter (in the movement) nor to stay in it. But who is part of it, has to play the game frankly". (END Charter, 1947).

We can not conclude our work without an act of thanksgiving that comes from the bottom of our hearts to the Lord and to Our Lady the Virgin Mary that have much assisted us during this work. Putting into relation the different points of view, sometimes even opposite, it would not have been possible without the Holy Spirit assistance. Of course, we have lived together a true exercise of collegiality which enriched each of us and that made us grow in the understanding of conjugal spirituality. May the Lord allow that this humble work can contribute the same to a better understanding and practice of conjugal spirituality within the équipes Notre Dame.

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ATTACHMENT I

SOCIOCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT – COMPARATIVE TABLE

SOCIETY

Father Caffarel's time	Present time
The authority and role of big institutions are conclusive in the life of people and their influence is not contested	Fall in the credibility of big (political, religious and financial) institutions Frequent contestation
Predominance of States' influence. Distrust of the foreigner who appears little frequentable. Start of personal computer science (PC).	Economics, culture and communications become world-wide and dominated by money. Tendency to economic and political unions. Internet is generalised with freedom of access to communication
From 1970 we enter the consumers' society	It all pivots on personal profit, on consumption and on "we want it all, we want it now"
The Catholic religion still plays an important role in the State's structure and life	There is a growing separation between the State and religion. Laicality becomes the rule in the State's structure and life. Tendency to put the Catholic religion on the same level as other great religions
The progress of science is real but still limited	al development of knowledge and scientific applications (chemistry, physics, biology, medicine, mathematics...) with the diffusion. New problems connected with bioethics nobody can foresee what will be the everyday tissue of life. We left the world of foretellers.
Work is still available. It's a period of full employment. Few strikes Import of foreign labour. Balance of time spent in work/rest/family	As a result of the world-wide economics, there is a delocalisation of industrial societies. Loss of jobs. Great increase in the number of strikes. Stronger and stronger pressure on staff. Dehumanisation in the relationships among people. No more balance work/rest/family
Deterioration of life environment Appearance of a number of ecological parties and movements	Great awareness of the urgency to respect environment, to go back to a healthier life.
Young people are still respectful of authority and subdued to the authority of teachers	After May 1968, young people claim more sincerity in interpersonal relationships
Little use of drugs	Frequent use of drugs by young people.

CULTURE

Father Caffarel's time	Present time
Different cultures only rarely cross the geographic limits of States	Foreign cultures are in the foreground. Emigration has caused a great variety of population of foreign origin, who brought many new beliefs. Development of sects.
Communication among people is mainly carried out by opinion press, radio and television, books and magazines	Access to communication becomes universal. Internet opens the access to all kinds of information to everybody, without discerning its exactitude and validity, and almost without control. Other cultures are no longer separated from ours
The basic range of values and of objective truths is still accepted	Loss of solid values, which causes much bewilderment in many people
The sense of duty is a basic rule of shared life. To behave with rectitude and to do one's best are recommended values	Omnipresent and exasperated cult of individualism. What is important is the individual maximum realisation and happiness. Loss of social feeling.
Lot of ignorance about human sexuality that is often a subject not to be talked about.	The sexual revolution of the '60ties is generalised. There is a dissociations between sexual act and procreation. Conjugal faithfulness is relativised. High increase in the number of divorces (in big towns one out of two).
Chastity and modesty are still regarded as virtues, but education is more and more centred on contraception, due to frequent failures in the control of fertility. Sexual education is still given by parents, though less and less Beginning of sexual initiation in schools	Quick development of contraception. Exaltation and development of homosexuality.

FAMILY

Father Caffarel's time	Present time
The years after the 2nd world war . brought a strong increase in marriages. with a remarkable rejuvenation of the spouses' age. Baby boom. Marriage is decided by the couple and less and less "arranged" by parents	Enormous fall in the number of marriages Spouses get married later and later Strong decrease in the number of children
A long engagement used to precede the wedding ceremony. The preparation for marriage is rare and rather conventional	The wedding ceremony is more and more prepared by the couples themselves, but cohabitation has practically substituted the time of engagement.
Opening of Centres for preparation to marriage.	The change in the concept of love results in ephemeral love, more connected with feelings than with commitment. <i>"I'll stay with you as long as I feel love for you!"</i>
The couple is officially constituted starting from the wedding celebration Marriage committed for life, both civilly and religiously	Marriage is no longer the origin of the couple and the family. The wedding institution and the role of the family are often denigrated. Sometimes couples are constituted and dissolved many times, at a faster and faster rhythm. Faithfulness is denigrated. Children are prisoners of the system and have anyway to adapt to it. "Monoparental" or "re-constituted" families, where filiation is no longer explicit, make children frailer and, when they become adult, they hesitate to commit themselves for good
Up to the 70ies, there was an only way to form a family: the marriage of a man and a woman. Through marriage, women had the experience of sexuality, waged work and independent lodging. This allowed them to enter life	The possibility for women to obtain a salary has resulted in a contradiction between their desire for personal autonomy, their opening to the outside, and traditional marriage. Many questions are raised with homosexual marriage.
The education of children is entrusted to parents Women at home are kept economically and legally dependent from their husband	Parents, both working and often overburdened with work, have no longer the time to assure children education, which is more and more entrusted to school Nowadays, women know how to manage their fertility. Generally, this has brought to freedom of behaviour, particularly because of new concepts regarding young girls' virginity and the sexuality of young people. Women work and are therefore economically independent. Family expenses are paid for by the two spouses.

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<p>Marriage is no longer considered a less important sacrament There are many doctrinaire documents on the richness of marriage (encyclical letters, documents by Episcopal conferences, inquiries into the sexuality of couples, documents drafted by lay people, etc...)</p>	<p>Lay people are no longer considered Christians of a lesser rank, but are more and more recognised as jointly responsible participants. The Vatican acknowledges the Teams of our Lady as an ecclesiastical movement.</p>
<p>Elaboration of a conjugal spirituality. The Teams develop all around the world They have great influence in the Council with regard to the apostolate of lay people</p>	<p>The Teams' development goes on. They insist more and more on their mission in the Church and in the world.</p>
<p>Oecumenism is not so much active. There is mistrust towards other religions.</p>	<p>Oecumenism among Christian religions becomes more active. There are more bilateral contacts with other religions</p>

CHURCH

Father Caffarel's time	Present time
<p>At this time, people are Christians by birth. All the great moments in life, from birth to Death, take place in a well-organised and well-structured religious milieu</p>	<p>Society is secularised and forces Christians to conviction. One decides to become Christian. One is "Christian by birth".</p>
<p>The religious authority impregnates the civil society. The Hierarchy dominates all Christianity and has great authority. There is still little sharing of responsibility, communion and collegiality between the consecrated world and the lay world. Great importance is given to parishes that manage all religious activities. The number of priests and monks is still high. The number of vocations starts to decrease, but is still remarkable. The practice of sacraments is still high. But religious practice is sometimes superficial.</p>	<p>The civil society becomes more and more laic. The Council has given a great liberating impulse, though some members of the hierarchy try to limitate its opening application. Some cardinals and bishops and many priests ask for a less triumphant Church, that gives more responsibilities to lay people, speaks of sin less and is chiefly turned towards the poor. Many Christians revolt against a certain integriste tendency.</p> <p>The fall in vocations and the ageing of priests cause many problems in the management of Church. The influence of parishes decreases. In many European countries, the credibility of the Institution is seriously jeopardised by cases of pedophilia. Many young people react to the omnipresent individualism. They are committed against injustice and want to go back to true love. They wish to live in an open church, in order to bring hope to a world where it is more and more difficult to live.</p>
<p>Apology of voluntarism, provided that it is well organised by the clergy (Catholic Action). Birth of various spirituality movements.</p>	<p>Many lay spirituality movements are born and developed. Hierarchy has become aware of the importance of families in building the world of tomorrow. They also recognise that new charisms are originated among lay people, as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit's presence and as a possibility of new apostolates in today's world. The mission of all baptized is rediscovered: to be Christians not for themselves but for others.</p>

ATTACHMENT II

The ages of a person’s life, the stages of the life of the couple, the stages or cycles of the couple and of the christian family related to their psychological features, emotional, and of the transition and of personal and conjugal spirituality

SYNTHETIC TABLE

The age of a person’s life	Stages in the couple life	Stages or life cycles of the christian family and couple	Emotional transitional features	Features of conjugal spirituality
1) Childhood and the conscience of love	1) The original scenery			Spirituality already exists in the child. Certainly, it is not an expression of an explicit religious faith but this spirituality arises from the way of being itself of the very little, which is at the same time sensible, relational and existential.
2) Adolescence and the search for a meaning (today the shift from adolescence to adult age comes later, about in the half-twenties).				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adolescence in its own nature stands for rebellion. - From the spiritual point of view the adolescent revolts also against - He/she avoids religious practices and sacramental life. - However. he/she lives a personal faith -
(The twenties, considered from 25 years on)	2) The romance, the first period of life in two (2 to 7 years) 3) The struggle for power (2 to 7)	1) The beginning of the conjugal bond and of family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint acceptance of emotional and financial responsibilities - Creation of a communicative cell - Strengthening of - Mutual knowledge - Learning to share with the other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited to the practice of the Sunday Mass - Limited attendance of the sacraments (communion and confession) - Individualist piety - The project of conjugal life is still confused with no

The age of a person's life	Stages in the couple life	Stages or life cycles of the christian family and couple	Emotional transitional features	Features of conjugal spirituality
	years)			strategical definitions
3) The thirties and the welcome of life	4) Stability	2 ^o) Families with kids (babies and children in pre-school age);	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New responsibilities and a new system of life regarding children - Learning to be mother and father - the concern to work harder to obtain the financial resources for the new size of the family - Concerns about the future (creating a more solid career) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beginning of a greater concern with the knowledge of the sacraments of christian initiation - Children are brought to the Sunday Mass - The spouses tell biblical stories to children - Beginning of a prayer phase with children (the evening, most of all)

The age of a person's life	Stages in the couple life	Stages or life cycles of the christian family and couple	Emotional transitional features	Features of conjugal spirituality
4) The forties and the crisis of desire	5) Commitment (between 40 and 50 years)	3 ^o) Family with children in school age (7 to 15 years);	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Search for more lasting jobs - Need of improvement or professional - Search for a bigger, more comfortable home - Expansion of the relationships with parents-families of classmates - Celebration of the feasts with the family (birthdays, Christmas, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From the point of view of the faith is God himself that is at work and tries to shake the human heart to free it from its illusions and open it to a new encounter with His mystery. The forties so divert a rebirth journey... - The couple begins to feel the need to fill a certain "spiritual void" - The couple wants to learn more on the sacraments of the initiation to christian life - The couple thinks about participating in a sort of "meetings for couples" - Growth in the piety of the couple (it stops being that individualist)

The age of a person's life	Stages in the couple life	Stages or life cycles of the christian family and couple	Emotional transitional features	Features of conjugal spirituality
5) The fifties and the force of a second breath.		4 ^o) The family with young and adulescents (17 to 29 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children set goals for their life - Children set their own identities - Phase of entry at university and in the labour market - Widening of the circle of relations depending on the children' mates - Crisis with the children to establish "boundaries" and the authority system (to contain children) - Children bring new values to the family - Rise of the personal, professional and conjugal satisfactions and dissatisfactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They remith themselves trutfully to the mercy of the God of Love. - They feel joy in conveying what can help others to grow. - The couple realizes that it can not be limited to an unin of two people 8need to strenghten the couple relationship) - Need for the couple to establish other relations (that imply a spiritual bond) - The couple has to renegotiate its marriage - The couple needs to remake its project of conjugal life - The couple spirituality is limited to a set of rites and practices outside the daily experience - Beginning of the ecclesial commitment
6) The sixties and the way of interiority	6) The co-creation	5 ^o) The family as "access level to work" or as a "starting point"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many concerns in the couple, due to the children' problems (first job, adaptation problems, search for prestige, search for a financial stability) - Concerns depending on the children' love affairs, their preparation to marriage, their preparation to the creation of a new family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They become present to themselves, to their personal mystery, to God's one. - They look for a sense in His death. - The God they pray is not unrelated to what they live but is an

The age of a person's life	Stages in the couple life	Stages or life cycles of the christian family and couple	Emotional transitional features	Features of conjugal spirituality
		<p>-----</p> <p>6º) The mature family (the mature age)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help in the education process of the children' families - Expansion of the family relations (new problems and new relation possibilities) <p>-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The parents must find other activities in life, apart from fatherhood and motherhood - Need to face changes in social status - With lighter financial responsibilities the couple can make new purchases, plan a new career, travel - Exploration of new roles - Signs of depression and disintegration of the couple - Strains in marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - integral part of their life. - The faith they desire springs from within themselves; it is a personal choice. - The more they reach the depth of their heart, the more they are close to God. - Is in their concrete life that God thakes them to make them like Him. - The couple also needs to jump further and to prepare for the next stage of the conjugal and family cycle of life. - Need to take part in a group of couples to strenghten their spiritual life. - a better understanding that the conjugal life demands more gift and concern <p>-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A better use of the "Church" (most frequent attendance of the Mass, greater participation to the social and humanitarian activities of the parish) - Greater tought at eternity (after death) - Participation to

The age of a person's life	Stages in the couple life	Stages or life cycles of the christian family and couple	Emotional transitional features	Features of conjugal spirituality
				groups of couples - More intense spiritual life - Understanding that spirituality is a path to reach God, being brought by His Spirit
7) Old age and the approaching of death				- It is time to wait for God as one that vigils waits for dawn, and accept that the task of our life may be left unaccomplished. - We prepare to die, to live our own passage, sometimes through the long trials of growing old and of illness - Faith tells us that we will survive to the death of our physical body.