

“Radioscopie”. March 15th 1973. A radio broadcast by Jacques Chancel with Father Henri Caffarel.

- Father Henri Caffarel, for years you have been unflaggingly inviting the men and women of our time and particularly married couples to come back to spiritual life. Spirituality may be a wandering soul, but it is not a dead one, should it be searched for so intensely?
- *I am convinced that each human being should reach full bloom (full self-realisation) and I think that Man cannot reach full accomplishment until all parts, all faculties develop to reach completeness.*
- You've just told me that you are a priest and that priesthood is a real job?
- *Yes, I cherish this idea because I like professionals and I like craftsmen. May I recall a moment in my childhood? I was in the countryside, one summer, and I made friends with a joiner in a mountain village, and I thought making windows and doors was quite easy and I saw a man who loved his job. First I thought all types of wood were alike and this man taught me how to tell one from another, he taught me how to estimate the age of the trees that produce these woods; he made me discover the very soul (if I may call it so) of these different woods; and I was amazed by the care with which he treated those woods, the gentleness! He knew how to hold them, how to work with the grain; knowing that you couldn't expect the same thing from all of them. Since then, I've found that someone with a job, someone who knows his job is someone wonderful, and that is the reason why I like to say that being a priest is a real job and I love my job!*
I have come across other jobs since: last year my aching back needed massage and I discovered the job of the physiotherapist. I didn't suspect that a man who kneaded backs and muscles could know so much about human nature, its problems and intricacies. Through the body, this man could guess thousands of things about the deeper life of the people he met, that was a real job! Well, for me, priesthood is a job, that is to say something you can't improvise, something you have to learn and as it is with all jobs, learning is difficult and mistakes many! Priesthood doesn't allow cheating. Professionals can't cheat: the joiner cannot cheat with his wood, the gardener cannot cheat with the tulip; if my priesthood is a job I cannot cheat with the people I talk to, and what makes this job so great is that it deals with human beings!
- So you are a professional?
- *I am a craftsman, a skilled worker ... I like these words because they imply some research and expertise which you don't necessarily reach but that you keep working on and towards which you keep trying to progress.*
- And from this idea, you've got into the habit of talking only about what you actually know?
- *About what I love, I'd rather say.*
- People often chatter pointlessly when they are questioned about things they don't know so well?
- *That's right, but sometimes, you get some uneasy feeling when great names of literature or arts or even of the Church are requested to express a hurried opinion on the important questions of our time. As a professional I know what having a job means and I wouldn't judge other people's jobs: I have my job, I love talking about my job but I remain open to all that may be of interest to my contemporaries. I would even say that it is precisely what fascinates me, but I can talk only about what I practice, about what I live out and I talk about God just because he conquered me some fifty years ago in the month of March 1923. That was a milestone in my life. There is before and there is after that day when God entered into my life, and since that day I've been serving Him!*
- That is a bit of sectarianism: because you only care about Him?
- *I wish you'd defined the word "sectarianism". If sectarianism consists of having one obsession and despising everything else, then I refuse to be considered as sectarian, but for that matter, if I care about God, I care about everything because God lies in everything, God is the origin of everything and I gather that only those who care about God can say that they really care about everything.*

- But, Father Caffarel, you also have to care about atheists who don't have a god?
- *Of course, I believe that they do matter to God. They may think that God doesn't exist, but God regards them as his beloved children. I have met so many of them in the course of my life, I even welcome some of them to my study quite often.*
- *To tell you the truth, I sometimes prefer to address atheists, to welcome atheists because our catholic customers often suffer from some introspective disease: they dissect themselves, examine and cosset themselves, trying to invent some spiritual beauty for themselves (like wearing spiritual make-up)! As for myself, the people I love are the hungry ones, the thirsty ones, those who are in quest for something. The rich ones who "own" human or spiritual "treasures" are often disappointing, but those who starve and have a thirst to quench are fascinating!*
- You said "catholic customers", Father Caffarel, is that the word?
- *Oh, I've used this word in a very flexible way!*
- Does it refer to the customers of the craftsman?
- *Maybe this word is not very kind! I meant certain people who are too keen on the company of priests and who haunt monasteries. These people might be called customers! But so many human beings come to us not as simple "customers".*
- *You see, I love this word "métier" in French because it comes from a great Latin word. In French "métier" means trade, craftsmanship, in Latin the word "ministerium" means ministry, office. It is a great word and I think it is not wrong to refer to this word when speaking of priesthood.*
- You have always been faithful to yourself since the day you met with God?
- *I've never tried to be faithful to myself, I've tried to be faithful to the one who had conquered me and I will not boast perfect faithfulness to Him! Perfect fidelity is impossible, it is something you aim to reach. Faithfulness is a demand of true love and as it is, when I was not faithful, I was uneasy!*
- Is it easier for you than for other people, because you are a man of faith, a man of prayer?
- *A man of faith, I am. And you have just said the word that explains how I have been able to try to be faithful: I am a man of prayer... in fact I should have been a monk! When I was twenty years of age, just after the day I was telling you about a few minutes ago, the day of my conversion, I had a place reserved in a Trappist monastery; I wanted to spend my whole life praying because I thought that of all activities prayer was the most efficient, the most decisive, the most universal!*
- For others or for yourself?
- *For the whole world! I believe that the people who pray are the lungs of humanity. Do you know the old story from the Bible, when the Lord was on the verge of destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham interceded for those towns. How many times did I get the feeling that the people who pray are those who keep up the relationship between humanity and God and who prevent Mankind from sinking into disaster.*
- You like monks?
- *I feel nostalgia for monasteries! I can't leaf through a book about medieval monasteries or hear the word "monastery" without feeling in my heart of hearts a deep emotion at this unaccomplished calling; maybe if I had not heard this call, I would not have been a priest caring about daily prayer, maybe my priesthood would not have been very fruitful and maybe I would not have been capable of this faithfulness we were talking about a while ago. I am sure that I owe all my life to prayer!*
- But why didn't you follow your vocation to be a monk? Some say that sisters, Poor Clares, Trappists, and other monks withdraw quite selfishly into their own world.
- *Well, I didn't Because I had a spiritual mentor who thought better a few days before I entered the monastery and said : "I'd like you to go into the seminary, and if you still want to be a monk in two or three years' time, you let me know and I will allow you". Then he asked me to become a parish*

- priest for 2 or 3 years and then he was impressed because I was quite successful in my ministry – if you can say “successful”.. It is not the right word but I can’t find a better one – and finally he invited me to continue; and I think probably I had to do what I actually do but I’ve retained a nostalgia for that life. So that I have, within myself, a monastery and at times I retire into that monastery!*
- But isn’t going into a monastery like taking refuge, isolating oneself and refusing the stresses of daily life in the world?
 - *You know, when St Paul talks about prayer, he speaks of a fight. And St Nicolas de Flüe, a Swiss saint, had a little remark: “We may go to prayer as to a dance and we may go to prayer as to a fight”. Well, to him who prays, praying is dancing at times, fighting at other times. They are not shirkers those who are in monasteries, and when they consider seriously the distresses of the world - as they should – they become affected by the distresses of the world, and I can tell you that night and day, they intercede with God, they plead on behalf of the world, they never waver, they fight against God.*
 - But here you are advocating their cause because in 1973, people find it difficult to understand these things?
 - *Some people don’t understand, some do understand pretty well, and a lot of young people understand perfectly!*
 - Those young people, they understand better than anybody else!
 - *That’s why I try so hard to help the young – and the adults too – to discover what prayer is, but you see I’m not sure about the word, I’d rather say that I try to help them to experience God. When I was a young priest, I thought to myself :” I will tell people about God, this God with a human face, this Incarnate God, this God called Jesus Christ, this God who gave up his life for Mankind”, then I realized that speaking about God was extremely difficult! We have to do more than that, we have to do better! We have to invite people to experience God. If we don’t do just that, we just play with words. But there you are: how on earth can you help people to experience God?*
 - Do you think that experiencing God will help them? Some people perhaps want to keep away from God?
 - *Well, maybe but we might as well help those who wish to be helped and show those who don’t know they are looking for something that deep down in their hearts there is a quest. I think that this is one of the important aspects of a priest’s life : helping people to discover that they are in a quest for something and what they are looking for because it helps them to escape from the anxiety and agony that inhabit nine out of ten of our contemporaries. Why are they so distressed, most of them? Because they don’t know that deep down, buried within them, there is some hunger, some thirst, some search, a quest for the absolute.*
 - Father Henri Caffarel, you were ordained in 1930. You know what a couple is, what a family means and you are interested in the condition of the married couple. How can you account for this preoccupation for the married couple? You have never been married?
 - *Never! well ... because Christian spirituality seemed to infer for quite some time that searching for God in one’s life, entering into the mystery of God was just for priests, monks, and nuns and that the poor married couples might just be saved, if they were lucky! And all my preoccupations, all my pains were to teach – to teach isn’t the right word - to help people to discover that human love is a way toward God. But then we must be aware of the type of love we are dealing with, we have to place milestones along the way, we have to help people to proceed on that road! This is my deep belief: human love speaks of God’s love, it is a kind of parable.*
 - Right, but can a man who has never been married really understand what the life and the problems of a married couple are? He sees them from the outside!

- *Do you think it is necessary for the doctor to have suffered from tuberculosis to understand his patients? I even claim that I understand them slightly better than they do themselves, because after hearing the secrets of hundreds and hundreds of couples, I know enough while generally a couple has only their own experience and they do not imagine that the experience of other couples is often quite different.*
- *You never considered taking the risk of such experience – that of married life – before God revealed Himself to you?*
- *Yes, I did! I thought I would get married one day!*
- *You miss being in a monastery but you don't regret being free?*
- *No, I don't miss being married because fifty years ago in this very month of March, someone stood in my way and between Him and me now it is undying closeness. I've never considered getting married since that day! This is love and all-embracing love, demanding everything from me!*
- *Do you think you have to love the people you meet for what they are?*
- *Of course! And I like the way you say it: I have often told married people, such a husband or such a wife: "Look, Madam, if you expect Etienne to be exactly the husband of your dreams, you will never get to love him! Love him just for what he is, and even in Heaven, he will not be the husband of your dreams, he will be the man he is! Here is precisely what I think, and what I like to say to all human beings : God only is capable of real love, He loves me for what I am with the good that's in me , with the evil, with my good deeds and with my sins. When God loves someone, He loves him as he is and He tries, shall I say gently to lead him to what He expects from him. To love us He doesn't wait for us to become such as He dreams us to be. God never dreams!*
- *How can the secret mechanisms of the human soul be discovered? Is there an itinerary, a formula, a recipe?*
- *First, you see, it is no science, no theory, it is a relationship between people. That's what I believe in! No book will help human beings, nor couples. Close relationship is required whenever possible, we have to join the other in his deeper self. I was impressed in my childhood by a little knick-knack at my grandmother's. We had our Sunday dinner at my grandparents'. There was a little trinket called a Russian doll. See what it is? It's like an egg with a face painted on it. You open this egg in halves, not just the top as you would cut a boiled egg, you open it in the middle and then inside you find another egg with a human face painted on it, and then another and yet another until you reach the last little doll. Now then all my life I have thought that human beings are Russian dolls. The whole question is to reach the deeper self and that's the reason why I became so much interested in India, Buddhism and Zen... you were telling me about Sri Aurobindo, what attracted me most in him was precisely..*
- *Indeed, we were talking about him just before the broadcasting started.*
- *It was precisely the search for this deeper self. You know that all his efforts with his disciples tend to make them reach their inner self, and in India in Buddhism they do the same... For me it is the key to everything. Faith, for me, is precisely the answer of the last tiny doll in me, the answer of my inner self to God.*
Married love is true only when it is the answer of two inner selves that fit and communicate. All the rest is but the side dishes of love with regards to thoughts, affects, sensitivity, sexuality ... but true love exists only when there is this communication from one inner self to the other inner self.
- *Father Caffarel, you have heard many secrets. How should Man behave? That's the main question!*
- *Behave in what sense?*
- *Behave in the world, with his fellow human beings, with his wife?*

- *The answer is that given by Christ to Mankind. He said "Love". Saint Augustine said: "Love and do what you please". The only answer is love. We talked about jobs a while ago: loving is a tough job! When I was young, boy scouts used to march to the song: "Loving is so simple..." But you know, after meeting so many married people in the course of thirty-five years, I think that loving requires very high skills! If I were a song writer I would write a song about this! So what we have to do is to love people, that is to say to join their inner selves. It does not mean loving people as a charity woman who gives her overflow of affection to all the people she meets without even inquiring about their names. Loving somebody means getting close to them within their secret, their mystery, their depth. And that is tiring at times! Sometimes, when I have met ten or fifteen people, I don't feel like making the effort to join the other in the depths of his inner self and I am happy with small talk.*
- *The main thing, Father Caffarel, is to progress in the difficult art of love. But how can this progress be achieved? Is there a way?*
- *Through loving you progress in the art of love, exactly as the craftsmen I was telling you about improve their craftsmanship by exercising their skills.*
- *Is love essential?*
- *But love is what I am made of! The human being who does not love is dead, he is just a corpse! Because God is love and Man is love; if the whole creation comes from God, it is love just as God is love!*
- *And you believe that Man wants to know more, to know better in our changing world?*
- *To know each other or to know themselves?*
- *To know themselves ... They are afraid...*
- *Indeed they are! And why are they afraid? I know! Because they have come across moralists since their childhood: their father, their mother, often their confessor...*
- *Psychologists and philosophers too...*
- *But mainly moralists, they ARE dangerous! People have been made to think that they are evil, wicked. So they don't like themselves. I am amazed by the number of people who don't love themselves. And one of the main assignments in my job as a priest is to teach people how to love themselves, to be reconciled with themselves. Very few people are reconciled with themselves, with the whole of their person, including with their body. I am astounded by the number of people who are not at peace with their body. That's the reason why, when I speak about prayer, more particularly to young people, I always spend a long time teaching them how to invite their body to participate in their prayer. By the way, you know India, you know that over there the main preoccupation is to find out the right attitudes for praying, to learn how to breathe, to achieve mental stillness. Teaching people how to love themselves, reconciling them with themselves, with their whole being is one of the main preoccupations I have ever had with the people who came to see me. Then it is wonderful, it is fabulous to see a human being who suddenly comes to love himself!*
- *To know himself?*
- *To know himself and love himself! I'm sorry, I am preaching now, but I've got to: what is necessary for someone to love oneself? Not only does he need to know himself – but I would even say that if he knows himself too well, he will not love himself because ... show me a human being who doesn't end up despising himself because he discovers in his heart heaps of evil, roots of evil everywhere. What makes it possible for a man to love himself is that he is loved by somebody else and that in the eyes of this other person, he discovers that he is lovable. Lanza del Vasto says somewhere about the eyes of a loving soul: "The mirror where we can see we are seen". If a human being discovers somebody's look upon him, a look in which he reads respect, not only compassion, not only pity or*

mercy but admiration and love, then he himself begins to progress, without even realizing it, on the way to self-love: "I might be love-worthy!" because deep down he has not been able to believe he was for ages, since he heard as a young child his parents say : " We will never manage to make a good boy out of you!" and if he is a Christian, and he used to go to confession and tell his sins, he has always felt such pangs of imperfection and failures that he has never dared to love himself, he would even think that loving oneself is wrong .

Of course, there are different ways to love oneself! We may love a child and spoil him, but this is not love! Loving a child means helping him to grow until he reaches full bloom. That's the way we should love ourselves, of course!

- Father Caffarel, we've had a few phone calls ... a lady is confused at hearing you say that God is not to be found in books while the Bible brings better knowledge of God than life in a convent where people are cut off from the world...
- Then, I have not made myself clear. Let this lady not worry! Through the Bible God speaks to us, through the Creation God again speaks, through the people who come and visit me, God speaks to me. God speaks in many ways and I believe that God's word, yes, God's Word is this man who here on our earth once said He was the Son of God. God had spoken in thousands of ways: through the Creation, through the prophets, but Mankind had not heard Him, so He sent his son to tell us about Him.
- What do you mean, Father Caffarel when you say that love is much more than love?
- I said that when speaking about human love, conjugal love, the love of husband and wife. Well I think that it is very dangerous to start progressing on the way to love if you are perfectly respectful of all the requirements of love. One day you will be brought to want more, one day, just because you have been a loving man who has tried to reach complete love, a need for the absolute will awaken, a need for absolute love and at that moment a problem will occur between husband and wife because no man, no woman can give anybody the absolute! How many times did I listen to such a man or such a woman- I'm thinking of a woman I saw recently: "You know with what passion we started in life, how burning our love has been for so many years. Now I am disappointed, our love disappoints both of us". I had this woman speak her mind and after a while, I said to her:" What is happening to you is wonderful! Because you have been so faithful to love, now comes the day when a need for absolute love has arisen". I asked her whether she knew a book by Aragon, entitled Aurélien. In Aurélien there is an astonishing woman, she is inhabited by what Aurélien calls "destructive passion", that is absolute passion, and because this woman is looking for the absolute in her lovers, she destroys them because they can't possibly give her what she wants. By the way, she herself doesn't know that she is possessed by this destructive passion Aragon tells us about. So I said to this woman:" You make me think of the heroine of this book by Aragon. Rejoice! Your love has led you to desire the absolute and now you are ready to discover the unique absolute love, God's love, and this will not turn you away from your love for your husband. If you make that discovery together with your husband, then your love will take on the dimension of the absolute because it will be in communion with God who will come and live between both of you.
- Is this so because the world of love is akin to the realm of grace?
- It is because God defined Himself or rather St John defined God: "God is Love" and Love is what the world is made of!
- Husband and wife can experience this throughout their life, but do they have to let God lead them in order to experience it? I know very virtuous couples who do not dream of God and who are perfectly happy. I know admirable couples who are not even married. Where is the truth?

- *I know such couples too! But when we speak of the truth, we have to make things clear: there is Truth which is absolute and dwells outside my human nature and there is the truth of my own being. I am on my way to Truth a bit like the little seed in the soil which is on its way to being the violet or the rose it will be later on. I am convinced that if a being tries hard always to be true, that is to say to correspond to what lives and vibrates deep down in his inner self – a bit like the seeds which are in the soil in this season in our fields and countryside – well this being will, little by little, become an ear if he is a seed of corn. I believe that every being is on their way to God because I think that God is a pole, a magnet that draws iron filings... But this can be ignored and a lot of people ignore it and they are sometimes disgusted because they have been introduced to a false god. We have been poisoned by those fake faces of God : whether it be the almighty boss as a famous writer puts it, or a cop or a softie of a Dad ... but these are faces of God which may lead the best among us to ...*
- Maybe some culture is necessary to recognize the right God amongst all those?
- *It is necessary – remember the story of the Russian doll- it is necessary to awaken the last innermost tiny doll. It may lie asleep within the greatest of philosophers and be wide awake within the humblest farmhand. So many farmers in India are open to God, precisely because their inner self is awake, whilst within so many intellectuals it is not awake just because this inner self is easily upset. If one prefers reason or the physical or imagination or what-not, this inner self, too touchy, doesn't show up!*
- But if a couple allow God to lead them, they will be happy? You promise they will reach Heaven?
- *After their death! What does happiness mean? To be precise, I believe that happiness - and I am back to my doll - is the happiness of the inner self, the happiness of the innermost tiny doll. I may suffer from an awful toothache and be profoundly happy. I may be sad because I have just lost a dear friend and be perfectly happy in a deeper zone of my being.*
- Father Caffarel, people speak of a happiness which does not consist in love, what is it? Where can it be found?
- *What do you mean?*
- Beyond love there is another happiness, as Lanza del Vasto is wont to say.
- *I believe that happiness lies only in love, and the hierarchy of love corresponds to the hierarchy of happiness.*
- Is there a perfect definition of a couple ?
- *I am suspicious of definitions! I like intuition better : it feels the reality of things and never defines them. Now how can you define ...*
- A definition is a kind of a prison?
- *A definition is always a cripple! I remember one day a chemist gave me the definition of tears: it was a chemical formula, there was H₂ O + other ingredients. A lot of good that had done us ! He had never seen a mother cry over her dead child, he had never seen a poor urchin cry in the street. There is no definition for a couple ... it's something you sense, you feel ...*
- The couple cannot be defined but it can be destroyed and we know what may ruin it.
- *Of course there are factors of destruction within man and woman and all around them. Lots of things conspire. All couples are threatened, and seriously so nowadays!*
- And there are limits to conjugal love?
- *I don't think there are limits but I don't believe it may be infinite, absolute! But I am convinced, and I have said it over and over again to the many couples I have come across in thirty-five years. I am convinced that they progress towards ever deeper and truer love and I can ask some of my friends to stand as witnesses. After thirty-five years of marriage, the value of their love is much greater*

than it was at the beginning. That's why I deny this easy saying we often hear: "At the beginning, it's hugging, then, it's holding each other's arm and at the end it's being stuck with each other!" But indeed, that's what often happens when they don't know their job! I am back here with this word "job". People don't know their job because no one has taught them their job!

- When you say: "they are stuck with each other", it may be understood as giving up. On the contrary couldn't it be the start a new life? To push it further, people commit themselves in marriage but is lifelong commitment possible? You have committed yourself for life, even for eternity, as a priest, is it possible to remain fully in the absolute?
- *You know, when you deal with human nature, you deal with the absolute. This human being who stands in front of me, if I meet him really deeply in true communication between my inner self and his inner self, if I commit myself, not for my own pleasure but in order to participate with all my heart in his salvation ... salvation, here is another of my pet words, sorry, I'd like to comment on it ... salvation, full accomplishment, complete happiness. If I am involved in helping this being to reach complete happiness, then my faithfulness will consist in never giving up whatever the difficulties! And I know some women who discovered that their husbands were rascals before they got married and had even progressed in their behaviour since their wedding and who remained totally faithful!*
- Were they right?
- *I'm thinking of one of them who visited her husband in jail. He was horrible with her, he meant to hurt her, to offend her, to discourage her. Why? In my conversations with this woman, I understood. This man had had an awful childhood – this I heard later on – this man who had never been loved could not believe in love, he wanted his wife's love to break up in order to fall into complete despair and be able to say : " Love is nonsense, I can't believe in it!" and this woman held on ! I think this man was hanging over hell by a thread... by his wife's love and so he never could say that love doesn't exist", he was never able to lose hope.*
- Father Caffarel, we have another call from a man who would like to know what you think of the fact that marriage is denied to priests?
- *To begin with, there are priests who are married in the East. Maybe one day, some priests will be allowed to be married. I don't think there will be priests who will be allowed to get married - I don't think this may ever be allowed, but married men might be allowed to become priests. Maybe one day the Church will consider that.*
I can't see any incompatibility between priesthood and marriage. I would not wish it for myself because I suppose that conciliating two passions must be awfully difficult! If the love for my wife were real conjugal love and the love for my children real fatherly love, then I would be terribly torn because I would not have just a free minute in the day and I consider that as a priest, I must serve everybody. But I know that there are in the East some excellent priests who are married.
- Something seems rather incredible. You know what the Church thinks about divorced people, you know how difficult it is to get one's marriage annulled and yet some priests get married in church and the Church allows it! There seems to be something unfair in this!
- *This leads us into casuistry (= extremely subtle reasoning often designed to mislead other people)*
- But it's sheer reality!
- *It is, and very painful! Some people suffer terrible pains. You know, as I said before, the Church is "expert", the clergy is "expert" and they have to try to reach "expertise". When one is in charge of a law, one has to be capable. I myself am not an "expert".*
But I do know of tragedies. Long before priests quit the priesthood and got married as is all too common nowadays, a dear friend of mine got married and he has always been a very welcome guest in my home. He let me in on his secret dilemma long before he gave up the priesthood and I

kept giving him support in his married life. However his marriage proved tragic too. There stands the absolute and there are the concrete realities. In such circumstances we have to love the people. They suffer, they are torn, above all we must refrain from judging them. God help me!

- Father Henri Caffarel, can you recognize evil and disapprove of it?
- *Do I recognize evil in me?*
- Evil...
- *Evil, yes, of course I do!*
- But this word implies Manichaeism, there are good people and evil people ...
- *Well, to remain on our subject, I will say that where the contrary of love lies - that is where hatred lies - evil lies. I have the feeling that hatred is harmful and that's the reason why it is evil. But from this idea, I would not say that because such a man doesn't love he is doomed to damnation. I don't judge the people, I judge hatred, the absence of love... and it is something quite widespread. Even the people who are full of hatred, I feel sympathy for them; very often they are poor kids who have been unhappy and who remain unhappy all their life. So they hurt people because they have not been loved! Anyway, hatred is evil.*
- And divorce, is it evil? Divorce is part of married life, it may be its sorrowful sequel?
- *God forbid me to say so! Divorce does not exist, divorced people do exist and I won't judge them!*
- But you are in favour of marital reconciliations?
- *When they are possible, of course, I am ... but they are not always possible! Some stories are real miracles. Nine months ago, in a prayer group I belong to, we heard that a couple was to divorce in one week's or two weeks' time. He had been an alcoholic since he was eighteen, a jolly good fellow all the same! She belonged to the aristocracy and was miserable. For some time she was regularly woken up by a bar-tender or the police: "Your husband is lying in a ditch, your husband is in our pub and it's closing time, come and fetch him!" And there she goes and fetches a drunk husband! So I said to the group : "Do you or don't you believe in Christ's words?: " what you ask in my name, He will grant you!"; They said : "Yes, we believe that! " "Listen, there's nothing to lose. What do you think of inviting this couple to our prayer, even if they live two hundred and fifty miles away from Paris?."They said:"Okay, why not?!" We tried to contact this ... vaguely Christian couple, they came along, we laid hands on them in the way the Catholic Pentecostists do in the States and then we prayed with them. You know what? He has not drunk a drop of alcohol for nine months and a few days ago he joined me and others for a week of retreat and prayer.*
- Is there a ministry of marriage?
- *There is!*
- And a symbolism of marriage?
- *There is!*
- A lady says: "At long last, here is a priest who speaks of the inner self and who tries to bring Man to discover the essentials of happiness! Another lady asks if what Buddha preaches is like what you preach and if the words humanity and depth existed before Christ?
- *Man has always been invited to plunge deep down into himself, to join his inner self. In India, it had been the main search from time immemorial. The thousands of ascetics who retire in the Himalayas, what do they do? Those who practise yoga ... the twenty-six different types of yoga, what do they actually do? They try to reach this peace, to enter into the secret chamber, the intimate dwelling – they have all sorts of words for it-, the inner cave, that is to say the "deeper self" which finally opens onto God Himself, because by plunging into his deeper self, Man, one day when he reaches the deepest layer, the most intimate one, sees a trap door open and just then he gets lost in God.*

That's what so many mystics have experienced, because deep down within myself, I find more than myself; and I would not reach the deepest part of my being if I did not reach the God that dwells within my deeper self!

- But Christianity does not worship Buddha?
- *The latest Church Council decided that we should examine all the fundamental values which have been discovered by all the searchers of all religions. That's why there is a pontifical council in Rome that deals with keeping in touch with all other religions.*
- Father Henri Caffarel, we have spoken about conjugal love, we have spoken about the married couple, because it's your pet subject, and we have spoken about divorced people. Couldn't we speak about widows, those women who are said to be forsaken, who meet with a lot of sympathy when they lose their husbands but who, unfortunately, are quickly forgotten afterwards.
- *I wonder whether you ask me this question because you know that I've tried to care about them?*
- That's the reason for my question!
- *In 1940, several young women rang my bell and these twenty-two, twenty-four, twenty-five-year-old women told me: "You helped us to live through our married life, you have to help us to live through our widowhood now, and you must tell us there is a Christian meaning to it!" I answered that I did not know anything about it but I was ready to try and find out with them. That's the way I always proceed! "Would you like me to search with you?" That's what I answered the first couples that came to see me thirty-five years ago and asked me to talk about love and marriage. "Let's search together!" That's what I said to those widows. And we discovered a new aspect of widowhood, very different from the one I had known in my childhood when the widow used to wear mourning clothes, to live in the dark, to deny herself all sorts of pleasures.*
- That was a long time ago, widowhood is not bound to be an abyss nowadays!
- *That's it! We discovered that the couple lived on, that if we mean to be logical, the husband is alive in another world, the links are not shattered! Love is stronger than death, so the Bible says!*
- But the bond of fidelity is broken by death?
- *What do you mean by fidelity? Fidelity in the eyes of the law, of course! The woman who has lost her husband can remarry, but there is another form of fidelity. Some hearts cannot face remarrying but others consider another marriage. There again, it's a matter of calling: let us not judge, let us not condemn anyone! But I have lived – and I am still accompanying them – with women who believe precisely that their love was not shattered by death and this completely changed the way they brought up their children; while all psychologists and psychiatrists asserted that after the first world war, widows' children would never be able to reach full bloom, these ladies I am telling you about – because they managed to tell their children about their husbands as human beings that couldn't be seen nor touched but were alive nevertheless, therefore these children did not live through the traumas others had gone through. Not that it is easy. Let us not simplify things, but the atmosphere at home is quite different.*
- But Father Caffarel, remarrying is still possible and even desired? Everything can start again since, if you take into account what life actually is, loving eyes are creative eyes?
- *Indeed! I know some widows who have remarried and built excellent couples but I greatly admire those I know who are still living their one and unique love. I have known them when they were engaged, married and widowed and I see them happy with this love.*
- How do you picture the society of the year 2000? How do you picture your Church, this Church that is changing, undergoing massive alterations? But here, we may be looking for the opinion of the theologian!

- *Precisely, we are no longer in the view I was talking about at the beginning, the view of a job. I know pretty well the things I am working with. I'll tell you what I really think : either we manage to overcome all the routine, the sclerosis and the formalism that lie in faith and Christian life in order to rediscover the great mystical sources, to rediscover life with God – that's what young people claim, that's what the Hippies claim (I met some of them in the States) and then we will proceed towards a revival of Christian life and of the Church, but if we don't make that effort towards inner life, not only towards reforming the structures ... for the problem does not lie in the structures, the question is to know whether we will bring all Christians to inner life with the God that inhabits them.*
- Will the couple be protected in the future? Or will they protect themselves?
- *You know whatever our time is: primitive man, yesterday's man, tomorrow's man ... Man is made to love and he is made for married life. That's the reason why I respect sexuality so much , on condition that you don't call sexuality sheer procreation and physical eroticism, on condition that you call sexuality this difference and complementary nature of the sexes and this relationship between man and woman that should emerge in many ways. One is bound to say that nowadays there seems to be but one type of relationship between man and woman, and that is appalling! The relationship between the sexes is a fabulous reality, what a shame it now boils down to sheer eroticism!*
- Father Caffarel, a listener who is unfortunate enough to be of a meek disposition would like to know what to do when facing violence and hatred in daily life and even assault: should we put up with it ?
- *Certainly not!*
- Attack?
- *Love!*
- Again the key word!
- *Christ disarmed hatred with love, and I have seen astounding things, love being stronger than hatred, but God! How difficult that is!*
- A very moving phone call : from a lady whose husband is ill and unaware of his illness. She asks Father Caffarel, whom she admires, to pray for her husband, so that he may recover. Praying is not within everybody's capability!
- *I promise! That's the reason why I founded a home of prayer, some sort of a Christian Ashram, fifty miles away from Paris.*
- Without any commercial target?
- *You bet No commercial target! Tomorrow what I call a week's session of prayer begins. Women, men, priests and nuns, fifteen to eighty-five- year-old-people . There they are, fifty of them for six days of complete silence. That's great joy! During these six days we try and progress towards better knowledge of God, taking into account our whole being. There are corporal exercises, people are taught how to adopt physical positions for prayer, to put their body at peace, to breathe, this science the Hindus know so well and we still ignore. At the same time we tell them about God and after 6 days, they are amazed to know one another so well. I tell them – but of course they don't believe what I say – speech has been given to Man in order to hide his feelings. Through silence, he bares his heart in an extraordinary way.*
- Let us begin this week's prayer. Let us begin by being silent. We have arrived! Thank you Father.