

COMMANDOS

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“Teams are not nursery schools for ‘respectable’ adults but ‘commando squads’, made up exclusively of volunteers. No one is forced to join a team, nor to remain in it, but whoever belongs to it must play the game honestly.” Charter of the Teams of Our Lady

A few months ago, a priest friend of mine told me, in all simplicity and frankness, his objections to Teams: *“Why don’t you give complete freedom of initiative to individual teams?”* he said, *“Why impose study topics, discipline, methods etc.?”* We debated the matter at length and, in the end... each of us stuck to his position. Then we talked about other things and he told me that he had just joined a mutual support group for priests.

Perhaps you do not know what is meant by a ‘mutual support group for priests’. They are diocesan priests who carry out their normal tasks (parish clergy, chaplaincy etc) and who are under their bishop like any other secular priests. They join a mutual support group in order to find in it the spiritual help they need. They do not live as a community but are bound by a shared ideal of priestly holiness, by a common rule of life and by close friendship. Some join such a group as soon as they leave the seminary; others, more numerous, think of doing so after a few years of ministry. Having experienced solitude and freedom, having become aware of their weaknesses, having seen some of their priest-colleagues settle down into mediocrity, they discover the importance of not being on their own in the struggle for priestly holiness; they feel the need for discipline; they want some brotherly control; they understand the security that mountain climbers feel in being ‘roped together’. It is then that they are ready to join a mutual support group.

But, when you are ‘roped together’, the rule is not only to get others to help you; it is also to give support to others. It is this double objective that these priests pursue when they join a mutual support group.

Coming back to my conversation with my priest friend, without knowing it, he had just given me the best arguments for Teams. I said to him: Our teams are, for couples, a bit like what the support groups are for priests. When a couple who want to live fully their Christian life, feel isolated; when they find that good resolutions are, more often than not, not followed up and fruitless; when they are afraid of getting stuck, like so many others, in routine, materialism etc, then they turn to Teams. They have reached the point when they can understand the reason for Teams and to benefit from the demands that they make.

- Will they complain about the discipline? - This is the very thing they need most!
- Or about the framework, the rule, mutual help and brotherly control? - These are the things they lacked, that they were looking for and that they find in Teams.

They also find in Teams – and this not their least joy – the opportunity of helping couples who, like them, seek from Christian friendship the strength to strive after Christian perfection.

I wanted to return to these fundamental concepts, for it is important that we should be in full agreement on what we think, want and pursue. I am even more convinced today than on the day I wrote the following words for the first time, that the Teams must not be *‘nursery schools for ‘respectable’ adults but ‘commando squads’, made up exclusively of volunteers’* whose members pursue with determination the deepening of their Christian life in order to live it out fully in their family, their work and society.

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