

## **HISTORY OF CAFH**

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How did Cafh begin and what are its historical roots?

We actually have to go far back in history to know about the beginnings of Cafh, to look to Egyptian lore, to that wisdom's influence upon Greek initiatic and philosophic schools, and later see its influence on Judeo-Christian culture and the work of the secret or esoteric orders, especially that of the orders the Christian knights founded at the time of the first Crusades, when they came into contact with the sages of the East.

Down through the centuries, these orders conserved and transmitted, within the context of Western thought, the fundamentals of the ancients' knowledge and what had been revealed to beings of great spiritual development.

The purpose of these spiritual orders was to stimulate their members' spiritual unfolding while, at the same time, working for the advancement of society. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, before the French Revolution, the orders in Europe divided between the supporters of the monarchy and those favoring more liberal ideas. The first were closed, hermetic. The second promoted social, political and ideological changes; to a large extent, they forged the societies of today.

On the other hand, within the orders there were groups which focused their work primarily on the spiritual unfolding of the individual. Their membership was small in number; the instructor-disciple relationship was direct and personal, and they worked in a way unknown to the world around them.

The closest antecedents of Cafh date back to these groups of interior spiritual work, and their teaching was influenced primarily by Christian asceticism-mysticism.

The history of Cafh, as we know it today, began when Santiago Bovisio, a 21-year-old Italian emigrant, arrived in Argentina and commenced his untiring spiritual labor.

Don Santiago—as he is affectionately known—was born in Bergamo, Italy on September 29, 1903. His formal schooling was in Vigevano and he undertook religious studies in the Passionist Congregation of Turin. In Venice, Don Santiago joined an esoteric order, which he later referred to as “The Order,” whose members disappeared almost entirely during the devastation of World War II. In that Order he underwent rigorous studies of asceticism-mysticism. He was then asked by the Order to go to America with the purpose of carrying out a spiritual work. He arrived in Buenos Aires in January 1926.

In Argentina, Don Santiago married and raised a family with Amelia Taccagni, who accompanied him throughout his life.

During his first 10 years in Argentina, Don Santiago strove to spread his vision of spiritual life. He gave talks, published articles, and organized activities for human advancement; by 1937, he had already met some persons willing to accompany him in the spiritual work he yearned to offer society. Together they formed the first group of Cafh.

The word *Cafh* has ancient roots and several meanings; for example, it's the eleventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It also appears in the Tarot as the card Strength, symbolized in the figure of a woman holding closed a lion's jaws.

For Cafh members, the word *Cafh* symbolizes the soul's effort to reach union with God. At the same time, it represents the divine presence in each soul.

We can describe the history of Cafh, from 1937 to the present time, in various stages:

### ***First Stage***

*The first stage* covers the time from its founding on March 3, 1937 until May 1949. During this time, Cafh was governed by a provisional Rule prepared with the idea that the membership of Cafh would be small in number.

This stage's most important milestone was Don Santiago's election as director of Cafh, on October 28, 1945.

All through this phase, Cafh members applied the criteria of carrying out an individual, spiritual, inner work. They remained unknown to society, very much like that of the European order Don Santiago had participated in.

The teaching of Cafh, transmitted by Don Santiago, gave its vision of spiritual unfolding, human becoming, the great religions, and Christian asceticism-mysticism, along with the traditional teachings of the esoteric schools concerning the astral and mental worlds. The asceticism-mysticism was based on prayer, meditation, self-control and the practice of upright actions.

### ***Second Stage***

*The second stage* extends from June 1949 up to Don Santiago's death in 1962 in a car accident. We can discern two periods in this stage.

*The first period* covers from June 1949 until 1955.

In June 1949, the members of Cafh began to be governed by a permanent Rule. This Rule sets up three categories of members so as to respond to people's characteristics, the way they want to lead their lives and the commitment they wish to have with the spiritual work of Cafh. These categories are known as Ordained, Solitary and Sponsored. These categories, in turn, are divided into groups known as Tables—a term used in the tradition of the orders of knighthood—with up to 43 members. With the adoption of the 1949 Rule and the

creation of the categories, Cafh ceased being a secret order. The Community and Retreat houses, the creation of institutions and works sponsored by Cafh, made its existence explicit. Moreover, Don Santiago encouraged transmitting the ideas of Cafh to society and making Cafh available to all those desiring their spiritual unfoldment.

The first Ordained Table was comprised of women living in community. It was founded in Embalse, Argentina, on November 6, 1949. This community began a school and took care of retreats for Solitary members. On June 13, 1953, in La Plata, Argentina, the first Ordained Table of men living in community was founded. Three years later, in 1955, there were already 39 Ordained in Argentina and 17 Solitary and Sponsored Tables.

As for its teaching, Cafh conserved the European Esoteric Orders' legacy in some of its ideas, its symbology and ceremonial; it also retained the traditional nomenclature of the Christian Orders of Knighthood. To the previous teachings—those from 1937 to 1949—Don Santiago added ones on theology, philosophy, human history and, especially, on the idea of renouncement as the substratum underlying all the teachings of Cafh. Furthermore, in the course *The Good Road*, he put forward in simple and clear terms a practical approach to spiritual unfolding and asceticism-mysticism.

From the spiritual point of view, we could call this period of Cafh one of introspective work. It was a time dedicated to inner life, meditation and prayer both for the benefit of its members and for the good of the entire world. The members of Cafh contributed to the common good by taking distance from the vicissitudes of daily life, cultivating serenity and discernment, and thus collaborating in the work of the environment around them.

*The second period* covers the time period from 1955 to 1962.

Don Santiago proffered the teaching through his writings in general, and in particular, through his Annual Messages and his life example.

Though indeed Don Santiago founded Cafh inspired by the tradition of the European Orders, from the very first moment he stated – and in 1937 wrote, in the course *Spiritual Unfolding* – that we were entering into a new epoch, that great changes would be occurring in society, and that possibilities undreamed of until then would be discovered, and he urged the members of Cafh to look to the future. Based on this vision and the inner work already carried out by its members, the 1956 Message oriented Cafh's mystical path of introspection and prayer towards a much broader perspective, embracing society and the human condition. He taught that participation with souls – with all souls – is the essence of love.

The 1957 Message encouraged Cafh members to make real and transmit the idea of renouncement and made the meaning of participation more explicit by explaining its two aspects: on the one hand, to participate as we share with others

the spiritual wealth we discover through our understanding and our experiences, and on the other, to participate as we learn from what we find good and applicable in the new ideas and discoveries appearing in society.

The 1960 Message contextualized the Mysticism of the Heart, saying that to evaluate our inner experiences and our beliefs with greater clarity, we needed to support our mysticism on a rigorous base of knowledge, since evaluations based only on our subjective experiences can lead us to give more weight to impressions we receive than to events just as they take place.

The 1961 Message further clarified this approach for us, urging us to distinguish between faith and the comprehension of what is certain, to not confuse truth either with subjective mystic experiences or with theories about supernatural life. In this way, he prompted us to apply the scientific method, especially the concept of verification, to spiritual life.

As for the teaching, Don Santiago thought esotericism (knowledge accessible only to the chosen or initiated) no longer existed, that what was considered esoteric knowledge had already been divulged and was within everyone's reach. He likewise said that so-called esoteric teachings must answer to scientific rigor, and that those which couldn't be proven would have to be taken only as theories which were possible, but not definitive. He taught us, moreover, that advancement in scientific knowledge not only was not opposed to religious and spiritual ideas, but rather broadened and underpinned them.

For Don Santiago, faith did not consist in asserting that this or that belief is certain, but rather in the deep certainty that one as a human being has in oneself the capacity to bring innumerable possibilities into actual being and to respond to life's fundamental questions. This is the spirit of Cafh's teachings: they are offered to us as raw material to work on, not as articles of faith.

Don Santiago explained to us that Cafh is an idea and a work open and adequate to the new times he anticipated, in which knowledge would be accessible to any person whatsoever, without restrictions.

During this period, the number of Cafh members continued to increase. In 1962, there were 66 Ordained members and, between the Solitary and Sponsored Tables, there were 32 Tables in Argentina, five Tables in Brazil, one Table in Chile and one Table in Venezuela.

### ***Third Stage***

The third stage extends from 1963 until 2005, and in it we can distinguish four periods.

*The first period* covers from 1963 to 1976.

On May 8, 1963, Jorge Waxemberg was elected director of Cafh.

Jorge Waxemberg was born on July 14, 1929, in Tucumán, Argentina. He went to college in Rosario, earning an architect's degree in 1952. Entering Cafh in 1947, he joined in founding the first men's Community, and lived in community until 1963.

Jorge Waxemberg received from Don Santiago, from 1953 until the latter's decease in 1962, spiritual counsel and instruction about religions, mystical asceticism and fundamental concepts of Cafh's teaching. Furthermore, he accompanied Don Santiago in his frequent trips assisting the work of Cafh, including a journey Don Santiago made to meet Cafh members in Brazil and take care of personal affairs in Italy.

During his term as director of Cafh, Jorge Waxemberg became one with Cafh members' efforts to expand Cafh's work, and especially with those members who were willing to move with their families and communities to distant locales so as to bring Cafh's work to other peoples of the world. As a result of this joint work, by 1976 there were more than 200 Ordained Tables and 150 Solitary and Sponsored Tables in 15 countries.

*The second period* stretches from 1976 until 1992.

In 1976 in Argentina, a political change of momentous social significance took place. A military dictatorship which would last for the next 7 years installed itself in power. The loss of freedom of assembly and speech, added onto the persecution and assassination of those not submitting to the repression, appreciably affected the work of Cafh's members in Argentina. The military forces settled into the properties of the Embalse and San Ignacio communities, took control of their institutions, cut back their means of livelihood, and closed their schools. The communities of Santa Fe and San Ignacio also had to close down. Though indeed some Ordained from those Tables emigrated to other countries, in Embalse and San Ignacio Ordained did stay on, continuing their community life in spite of the military occupation and the difficult circumstances they had to face.

The Argentine Tables' reunions and activities continued taking place within the limitations typical of the situation the entire population was suffering through, with those carrying them out sometime risking their lives to do so. Many of those reunions had to be held privately, each Cafh member in their own home, independently following the reunion's schedule and themes.

In 1983 democracy returned to Argentina. Cafh's activities started up again with renewed fervor in that country, and the communities of Embalse and San Ignacio flourished once more. They concentrated their labors on recovering their means of livelihood, repairing the facilities which had become very run-down, and especially, in taking care of retreats for Cafh members, both in the houses for that purpose within the community properties as well as in those located elsewhere in Argentina. By this time there were already several other Communities in various

countries. As for the married couples' Communities, conditions did not offer such as to make their reactivation viable.

*The third period* extends from 1992 to 1999.

Jorge Waxemberg worked as a team with Cafh members on all matters of Cafh, which ranged from assisting its members to its works, teachings, and the fundamental ideas to be expressed and developed in the work of Cafh. The interaction of teams working together provides the feedback that nourishes, enriches and directs the work of Cafh.

On the groundwork of this feedback were based the teachings on spiritual life and the guidelines for the unfolding of Cafh's work, the annual Messages and Jorge Waxemberg's addresses.

Besides the themes of renouncement, prayer and ascetic exercises, the teachings deal with the theme of relationships as the substratum of unfolding in all realms. They integrate the idea of relationship to those of group work and teamwork, as an effective means for participation in all aspects of life. Furthermore, they associate this concrete participation with the process of spiritual unfolding and the evolution of our notion of being. In the 2002 Annual Message we read: "There is no basis for thinking that our relationship with God can be better than our interpersonal relationships. The mysticism we experience cannot be of a different nature than the relationship we have with humankind, which we are part of."

The teachings also define the principles, postulates and doctrine of Cafh.

The annual Messages describe how we are to make a science of spiritual work, apply good discernment in evaluating subjective experiences, keep ourselves open to new ideas and advances in knowledge, and harmonize what we know with our way of living and our priorities. They also convey to us the idea of continuously renewed realization as contrasted with the ideal of a final realization. They explain that nothing in life is final, that recognizing that each moment contains a possibility for us to fulfill plants us squarely in the here and now, and that the eternal present is the only field we have in which to unfold ourselves. Likewise, the Messages remind us to live the Mysticism of the Heart and detail this process of expansion of consciousness in the light of the ten words of spiritual unfolding. The Mysticism of the Heart isn't reserved for special beings, but rather is inherent to the unfolding of every one of us.

The addresses deal with several themes. With regard to authoritarianism in personal relationships and when giving counsel, they remind us to respect individual freedom in personal decisions. With respect to conflict prevention and anticipation, they remind us to acknowledge the diversity in human life and to harmoniously integrate the differences. With respect to prototypes and archetypes in our vision of the ideals we yearn to realize, they prompt us to achieve a spirituality free of pre-set ideas, open to the mystery of the unknown. As for the

Work of Cafh, they invite Cafh members to let it be more the result of their lives than of their words: for it to be the expression of their unfolding.

*The fourth period covers 1999 to 2005.*

In 1999 the members of Cafh approved changes to the 1949 Rule, adapting it to their different characteristics, situations and lifestyles and to the changes society had undergone in the 50 years since the Rule had been written.

At the outset of 2005, there were 56 Ordained Tables, and 420 Tables between Solitaries and Sponsored, in 21 countries.

In May 2004, Jorge Waxemberg announced that he would retire the coming year from his function as director of Cafh. Accordingly, he retired from that office on May 22, 2005.

### ***Fourth Stage***

On May 22, 2005, José Luis Kutscherauer was elected director of Cafh.

José Luis Kutscherauer was born in Cruz del Eje, Cordoba Province, Argentina, on August 12, 1943. He graduated from the University of Cordoba as a medical surgeon. He joined Cafh in 1961, and in 1973 entered the Community of San Ignacio in Cordoba, Argentina, where he fulfilled several roles until 1979.

In 1977, during the military take-over of the Argentine Communities, he was appointed to deal with the person named as their official supervisor. He took charge of carrying out the various negotiations, making visits to the communities and helping their members throughout the military intervention process.

In 1979 he transferred to Costa Rica where, until 1997, he directed the Communities there; from 1983 to 1992 he carried out the function of assisting the members of Cafh in general in Costa Rica.

From 1979 onwards he joined in the social work begun and kept up with the resources generated by the Costa Rican Communities. He was elected director of these activities until 2005. Within the Communities' zone of influence, he focused social aid towards the following areas:

- Teaching adult literacy.
- Opening a free medical clinic.
- Providing family counseling to neighbors and employees.
- Collaborating in carrying out public infrastructure improvements in the neighboring towns, such as paving 25 kilometers of roadway, building bridges, bringing electricity throughout the zone, and installing telephone lines and running water.
- Collaborating in building houses of worship for different religions.

- Setting up libraries for two neighboring towns.
- Donating land and facilities for schools and sports fields.
- Donating resources for specialized medical attention in cases requiring treatments not covered by the country's socialized medicine program.
- Giving scholarships for secondary and college studies.
- Developing living quarters for employees.
- Developing entrepreneurial projects with the aim of employing laborers in rural or undeveloped zones.

From 1981 to 2005, he worked with the members of Cafh in Venezuela, Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia and Spain. From 2000 to 2003, he acted as assistant to the Community of San Ignacio, and from 2003 on, he formed part of the team that assists all the Communities. He was a member of the Board of Directors of Asociación Cafh in Costa Rica, and until 2005 acted as an advisor both for Asociación Cafh in Costa Rica and for Fundación Cafh in Argentina.

As the director of Cafh, José Luis Kutscherauer continues to guide the spiritual work begun more than 70 years ago when the first group of members met with Don Santiago in Buenos Aires, Argentina. These seven decades have seen an incredible expansion of a work which all started with a small group of dedicated people. Cafh is now found in cities and towns throughout the Americas, in Europe, Israel and Australia. Members of Cafh continue working together, supporting one another and devoting their lives to a committed inner work on the expansion of consciousness.