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by Henri LeMasne, a priest of the Diocese of Lyon, France

While reading the life of Charles de Foucauld by Ren Bazin, I had a strong intuition that God was calling me to be a priest, in the same way as Brother Charles, for the peoples of Islam. Some family reasons kept me from leaving for Algeria. So, I entered the seminary of Lyon. During my studies, the diocese formulated a project: to consecrate me to a new mission -- to assure a diocesan priest as a Christian presence to the Muslims, since a huge number of Algerian workers had arrived in France after the Second World War. There are today nearly 4 million Moslems from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey living in France, a great number of them now having French nationality.

I was ordained a priest in 1949, and appointed as an Assistant at a parish in Lyon. In 1953, I was freed to work with the Moslem immigrants. I had met Gabriel Isaac in 1949, and joined the little group of priests gathered around him. Gabriel was on a quest, and he had the conviction that something would arise in the Church that would permit him to live authentically as a disciple of Charles de Foucauld in the ministry of a diocesan priest. With him, I attended all the meetings which led to the birth and the development of the Union (the first name of the Fraternity) until the first International assembly in Taybeh in Palestine (e union was to be freely at the service of fraternity among all the priests; and, finally, with the lay people of our communities, with all people.

The Union was marked by priests who had a simple lifestyle, who lived near to the little people. Nazareth was the search for proximity, to share the lives of these people. The call for each one, whatever his ministry, was to live the evangelical life of the Church which was servant and poor.

I share my own testimony of a fraternity life with the Algerian and Tunisian workers and the Arab students, most of them Moslems, in a rooming house where they shared my life. It was called the Seventeen. That number, our address on the street, was for more than thirty years a place of conviviality, where my friends welcomed one another. Sharing the day-to-day created a strong bond among us. We became brothers by -- as the Arabs say -- sharing the bread and the salt. People of diverse origins came to meet us, loving to come because of the marvelous welcome of my friends from the Maghreb (North Africa). I lived an international fraternity of different cultures and different religions but I had trouble sharing this living with: no conversions, no social work -- what was its value? The sharing of life with those who were often excluded from our society required me to engage myself with my brothers, to become one with them in defending their rights as immigrants, to identify with the Palestinians fighting for a homeland in their country. I was living out Brother Charles' advice 'not to be guard dogs that don't bark.'



3) The Road to Friendship: Charles de Foucauld had the charism of friendship -- his letters with different correspondents are the proof of that. Friendship demands equality and reciprocity. It was in this search for friendship that he was prophetic and he opened up new ways for mission. At Tamanrasset, he was given completely to those around him; and it was they who saved him during the great famine of 1908. Friendship is the riches of the poor; but it is demanding.

4) To live as the Church, the People of God: Vatican II reminded us that the Church was not a pyramid, but a people, where the ordained ministers were only servants. The Church as People of God was an intuition of Brother Charles who wanted to gather into the same association the laity, religious, and priests. This was also the notion of the Union at its beginning: it welcomed priests and laymen; and this was a great richness for us priests. But the laity became a minority and had to form another group. In the Church today, to belong to a spiritual family like the Fraternity, which gathers many states of life, is an important sign. I believe in the growing notion of us as priests to participate in the secular fraternities not as a leader, but as a brother.

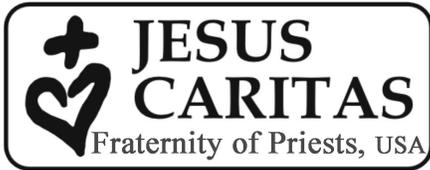
5) Brother Charles: Many priest weren't attracted to the Union because of Charles de Foucauld, but were attracted by his spirit. They had read Voillaume's *In the Midst of Men / Au coeur des Masses*, or heard the testimony of the Little Brothers or the Little Sisters, or simply felt the need for a fraternal life among priests. But one cannot remain for long in the Fraternity without making an effort to know the one who, by his life and his sacrifice, was at the origin of this movement of returning to the Gospel which makes us live.

I rejoice at the greater role and importance that Brother Charles is assuming in our fraternities. I was happy to notice, at our last International Assembly of the Secular Fraternity, that he was the reference for fraternities of every country. We must know his life, but also some of his writings, even if they are difficult in their style. By meditating on them, we are struck by the passion for Jesus and the Gospel that was in Brother Charles. His correspondence is very often fascinating (see his letters to Joseph Hours; Saharan Correspondence; Letters to Abb Huvelinî). I am a humble witness of a history which must be continued by my younger brothers, but memory is necessary to find the July, 1962). You will find an account of this story in *The Origins and Development of the Jesus-Caritas Fraternity of Priests* published as a special issue of the French "Courrier des Fraternites."

I would like to share with you the two intuitions that have led my way all these years:

1) "Jesus, loved for Himself, the source of apostolic action": This phrase of Ren Voillaume took us back to the essential: Jesus and his friendship as the heart of our life and ministry. The importance given to free adoration, to long and simple prayer that could lead us to the total and invincible faith of Brother Charles, the place given to the desert, where we accept that the Spirit helps our inability to pray, the importance of daily meditation on the Word of God.

2) Life in Fraternity, first of all between us: for many of us, our little fraternities were an answer



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to a need, a place for us to share not just our apostolic activities (we had other places to do that), but our life of faith, our search for God and our faithfulness to the Gospel. To remain entirely diocesan priests, it seemed to us important not to ask to live together, but to live between us a real fraternity, rich in the diversity of our ministries. In the middle of this life, we found a trusting and demanding friendship from which derived the importance of the Review of Life. Then, with the other priests of our presbyterate: to have friendly fraternities who could answer the need of friendship so strong among isolated priests. The vocation of the future, as an African proverb from Benin says: "It is at the end of the old rope that we weave the new one."

Questions for a Review of Life: What time do we give freely to God: Adoration, desert, meditation on the Word? How do we live the fraternity among ourselves: It is a demanding and trusting friendship which we attempt: how important is the Review of Life for us? How do we live the fraternity with all? What are the relationships we have with the poor, from which the Church is so distant? Are we bound to some of them with real friendship?