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Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God

CHARLES DE FOUCAULD

(Little Brother Charles of Jesus)

DIOCESAN PRIEST

(1858- 1916)

DECREE ON THE VIRTUES

"My Lord Jesus, who said, 'A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends', I desire with all my heart to give my life for you. I ask you with insistence for this: however, not my will, but yours be done. I offer you my life: cause me to live and die in the way that pleases you most: in you, through you and for you!"

This offering of himself made by the Servant of God Charles de Foucauld became a life lived in faith, in hope, and in charity towards God and neighbor, bringing him to an extraordinary resemblance to the Lord Jesus.

His conversion at the age of 28 had a profound effect on the whole of his future life: his discovery of the Father's merciful love, manifested to us in the Son; the love of Jesus, who gives himself to us in the Gospel and the Eucharist, and which drew Charles by love to a desire to give his whole life to Jesus present in the poorest of his brothers and sisters. He writes at a later date to a friend:

"I have lost my heart to this Jesus of Nazareth, crucified 1900 years ago, and I spend my life trying to imitate him as far as my weakness permits." "As soon as I believed that there was a God, I understood that I could do nothing other than live for him: my religious vocation dates from the same moment as my faith ... The Gospel showed me that 'everything must be enclosed by love.' "

Thus we can truly define this Servant of God as "the man who turns religion into love", recalling his emblem: "Jesus- Caritas".

Charles was born at Strasbourg in 1858, of a very Christian family. In his adolescence he gave way to the religious skepticism and positivism which were characteristic of the period, and he lost his faith. He immersed himself in a worldly life of pleasure and excess which, however, failed to satisfy him. He was an officer at the age of 20, and was sent to Algeria. Three years later he left the army and undertook a scientific expedition to Morocco, risking his life in the process.

His encounter with the Muslim faith, his interior search for truth, the kindness and tactful friendship of his cousin, and the help of the Abbe Henri Huvelin brought him to a rediscovery of the Christian faith at the end of October 1886. It was a total and definitive conversion.

In March 1887 a single sentence made a deep impression on his soul:



"Jesus took the lowest place in such a way that no one has ever been able to take it away from him."

And following this reflection, when he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land at the end of 1888, the reality of the Incarnation dawned on him, and he was bowled over by it: he wrote that

"walking the streets of Nazareth, which Our Lord, a poor craftsman, had walked before me" he discovered "the humble and hidden existence of the divine workman of Nazareth."

From that moment on Charles tried without ceasing, out of love, to tread in the footprints of Jesus, the Only Model.

Jesus of Nazareth had stolen his heart, and it was to follow and imitate him that Charles entered La Trappe in 1890. He stayed there 7 years, emptying his heart of all that was overly human, so that it might beat for God alone, and so that His will might become "the one thing necessary [...] the daily bread" of his life.

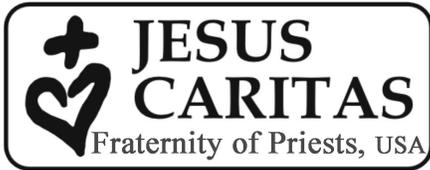
He rooted himself in faith, a faith which he showed also in the most perfect and loving docility to the teaching of the Church, which is the Spouse of Christ:

"Inviolable attachment to the Church, which is the Spouse of Jesus, and in which he truly lives. He is her soul, he loves her as his spouse attachment to everything that comes from her, her institutions, her rites, her ministers ... attachment to the Holy Father, her head and representative ... I will pray much for the Holy Father, for his intentions, for the Church ... [...] Great love for the Church which Jesus, her Spouse, loves so much: the more one loves the Church, the more one has the Holy Spirit."

His search for the Will of God, and his desire to live a poor life like the one he had glimpsed as he walked the streets of Nazareth, caused him to leave La Trappe. He lived for four years in Nazareth itself, at the convent of the Poor Clares.

This was a time of retreat, of prayer characterized by lengthy and loving contemplation of the Eucharist, and by persevering meditation on the Scriptures. In faith, he discovered the joy of spending long hours, day and by night, before the Tabernacle. It was his desire to imitate more and more perfectly Jesus who offers himself in sacrifice that brought to maturity his decision to become a priest, in order to make Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament in places where his Eucharistic Presence had never been. Nourished at the table of the Word and the table of the Eucharist, he was drawn ever further by the dynamic of love to become himself a 'living Gospel' in order to be able to give witness to the love of Jesus, as he was drawn and fashioned into the image of his Beloved Brother and Lord, Jesus in his eucharistic destiny.

Fascinated by the mystery of incarnate Love, he discovered, inseparable from the mystery of the Incarnation, the apostolic dimension of the life at Nazareth expressed in the mystery of the



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Visitation: taking Jesus to others in silence, as Mary did, taking him to people who did not yet know him - not in words, but by setting up an altar among them, a tabernacle which would radiate into all the country around it.

He left Nazareth and was ordained a priest at Viviers (France) in 1901. He went to the Sahara, to Béni-Abbes. Mgr Guérin, Prefect Apostolic of the Sahara, welcomed him into the Church of Algeria, and a great friendship developed between these two men, in the service of the Church's mission.

It was typical of his whole pattern of life that he now composed for himself a very precise Rule, but in his constant search for the Will of God, he remained, basically, ready to respond to all the impulses of the Spirit, taking the circumstances in which he lived as signs. From that derived his constant capacity to alter a life-plan which was apparently firmly fixed. For he was being drawn by Someone Other than himself to such an extent that, little by little, we see a new style of life emerging.

It was in this way that his desire to welcome all those who knocked at his door quickly transformed his hermitage into a beehive from dawn to dusk. And he soon wrote to his cousin,

"I want everybody - Christians, Muslims, Jews - to get used to seeing me as their brother, a universal brother. They are already beginning to call my house 'the fraternity', and I like that."

By welcoming the poorest, he discovered the 'monstrosity of slavery', of which many of the local inhabitants were victims. He did everything he could to denounce this injustice in the strongest terms:

"We have no right to be 'sleeping sentries' or 'silent watch-dogs' (Is. 56,10) or 'uncaring shepherds' (Ez.34)... I do not wish to betray my children or not do for Jesus, living in his members, whatever he needs. It is Jesus who is in this sorry state." "Whatever you do to one of these little ones, you do to me." The passerby who is poor, who is naked, who is a traveller, who suffers, asks nothing of us, but he is a member of Jesus, a portion of Jesus, and has a part in Jesus."

In 1903 Brother Charles left for the Hoggar. This is a mountainous region in the far south of the Sahara, inhabited by a nomad population, all Muslims, called the Touaregs. It was a new stage in his life, and only hope in God sustained him during very difficult times, and helped him to overcome the difficulties of a life lived totally alone, in the midst of the desert, among a Moslem people who were initially distrustful, in great poverty and insecurity. He also drew from his contact with Mgr Guerin the strength to hope that every person could be saved, and that the world of Islam could open itself to the message of Jesus.

From then on, a large part of his life was to be that of a nomad travelling in the desert - his journeys gave him the opportunity of entering into simple contact with the people of the country. He went to the desert not in search of solitude, but in order to go, little and approachable, to those to whom no one else would ever go. It was in this spirit that he established himself in a small village called Tamanrasset, where there was no French presence, and, in 1911, built a hermitage on the mountainous plateau of Assekrem.

He tried, always in the light of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, to make himself simply the friend and brother of the Touaregs, in all the vicissitudes and necessities of life.

He had envisaged his presence there as a preparation for proclaiming the Gospel. But he found that the time had not yet come for sowing, but for preparing the ground for a distant future. He learned the Touareg language and initiated himself into their culture, discovering more and more that in order to bring the Gospel it is truly necessary to love, and thus to get to know those to whom one is sent. That was the motive for his enormous, patient and erudite linguistic work.

He discovered more and more that his apostolate had to be one of sheer 'goodness':

"When people see me, they must be able to say, 'Because this man is good, his religion must be good.' If anyone asks me why I am gentle and good, I have to say, 'Because I serve One who is far more 'good' than I am.'"

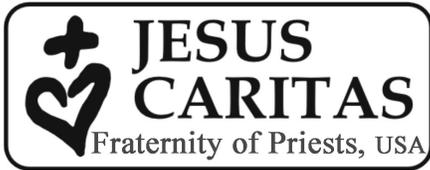
From La Trappe onwards, he never stopped developing the idea of having brothers and sisters who would imitate Jesus in his hidden life at Nazareth. ("little brothers and sisters of Jesus"). Faced with the immensity of the task, he stressed the importance of lay people in the work of evangelisation, new Priscillas and Aquilas. (cf Rom. 16,3-5). This was how he described the spirit he meant:

"Every Christian should be an apostle (..), in particular, seeing in every human being a brother, a child of God. Every Christian should see every human being as a beloved brother and have for all human beings the feelings of the Heart of Jesus ".

When war between France and Germany broke out in 1914, he decided, with much heartbreak, for his patriotic instinct urged him to return to France, to remain at Tamanrasset, linking his destiny to the end to the fate of those who had accepted him.

However, under the growing influence of the Senussi Muslim confraternity, sporadic attacks were becoming more frequent in the Hoggar.

On the evening of 1 December 1916 some Touaregs surprised and captured him. They sacked the hermitage, and Brother Charles was killed accidentally when the young man set to guard him panicked. So was fulfilled one of his long- standing desires: the desire to follow Jesus to the end, wishing to give his life and shed his blood as a mark of love. Twenty years earlier, he had written:



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"Whatever the motive for which they kill us, if we in our hearts accept an unjust and cruel death as a blessed gift at your hand ... if we do not resist, in order to obey your words, 'Offer the wicked man no resistance' (Mt. 5,3 9), and follow your example ... then, whatever reason they have for killing us, we shall die in pure love ... and if it is not a martyrdom in the strict sense of the word and in the eyes of men, it will be such in your eyes and it will be a truly perfect image of your death ... for even if we have not in this case offered our blood for our faith, we shall still, with all our heart, have offered and shed it for love of you."

In offering his life, Brother Charles truly followed Jesus, loving as he loved, to the very end (cf John 13,1). Four months before his death, he confided to a friend the secret of his charity for all people, especially the poor:

"I don't think there is any saying in the Gospel which has had a greater effect on me or transformed my life more than this one: "Whatever you do to one of these little ones, you do to me". If one remembers that these are the words of Uncreated Truth, and that they come from the lips that said 'This is my body this is my blood', what a tremendous power impels us to seek and love Jesus in these 'little ones', these sinners, these poor people."

After the death of the Servant of God, the reputation for holiness which had shone out in his life, was confirmed and spread through the world, and many men and women began to follow his example and his teaching, founding different religious congregations and pious associations. Thus once again the words of the Lord Jesus were fulfilled when he said

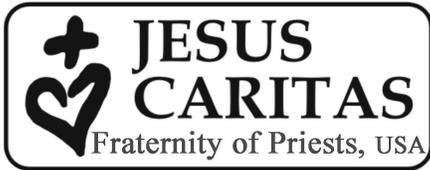
"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest." (John 12:24)

The Cause for Beatification and Canonization was introduced in the Apostolic Prefecture of Ghardaia in the Sahara through the celebration of the Ordinary Informative Process (in the years 1927-47), and to this were added 12 Rogatory Processes, drawn up in the same number of Curias.

The authority and value of these canonical investigations were recognized by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in a decree promulgated on 21 June 1991.

After the Positio had been drawn up, there was a discussion according to the norms to establish whether the Servant of God had practiced the virtues in a heroic manner. The theologian consultants met on 20 October 2000, and gave a favorable response.

Following this, the Cardinals and Bishops, in the course of the Ordinary Session of 6 February 2001, having heard the report of His Excellency Mgr Lorenzo Chiarinelli, Bishop of Viterbo and responsible for the Cause, officially recognized that the priest Charles de Foucauld had practiced the theological, cardinal and other virtues in a heroic manner. Finally, the Cardinal Prefect



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undersigned carefully reported all this to the Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II, and His Holiness, accepting and ratifying the desire of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, ordered the drawing- up of the decree on the heroic nature of the virtues of the Servant of God.

All this having been carried out according to the norms, having called together on this day the Cardinal Prefect undersigned, the Responsible for the Cause, and myself the undersigned Bishop Secretary of the Congregation, and the other persons provided for in such circumstances, in their presence the Most Holy Father made a solemn declaration to the effect that:

"It is established that the Servant of God Charles de Foucauld (Little Brother Charles of Jesus), diocesan priest, practiced to a heroic degree the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity towards God and towards his neighbor, as well as the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude, and the other virtues attached to these according to the requirements of the case."

The Sovereign Pontiff ordered this decree to be made public, and to be numbered among the acts of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Given in Rome on April the 24th 2001.