



ÉCHANGES

REVUE DES AMIS DE CHARLES DE FOUCAULD
SEPTEMBRE 2017 - HORS-SÉRIE



Charles

A Witness

for Our Times

Le comité de coordination de la revue **ÉCHANGES**:
Yvonne Demers
Gilles Dugal
Nadine Taylor

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la.revue.echanges@gmail.com

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Céline Martin
2518, avenue Jeanne d'Arc
Montréal, QC H1W 3V9
celine.martin@bell.net

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A Tribute to Charles de Foucauld:

Canadian brothers and sisters wish to share with their English-speaking brothers and sisters

The periodical *Échanges* has been in publication for the last 30 years and serves as a precious link amongst the Friends of Charles de Foucauld of Quebec. On the occasion of the Centennial of the death of Brother Charles, the 2016 issues were dedicated to the celebration of his life. These issues were published and distributed in large numbers, because of their rich content and because the editorial committee wished to surf on the wave of fervor and enthusiasm surrounding the numerous festivities of the centennial aimed at spreading the knowledge of Charles' spiritual charism, a spirituality that is modern and pertinent in the 21st century.

Moved by the desire to share this content with you, our English-speaking brothers and sisters, the editorial committee of *Échanges* has translated and published a special electronic version in English. The articles, selected from the last four issues of *Échanges*, were written by sisters and brothers of Quebec fraternities. Following Charles' spirit of universal fraternity, we wish, in all humility and sincerity, to share these writings with you, friends and readers abroad.

In this special issue, the reader will find articles on Charles de Foucauld, his life, his spirituality, and the depth of his writings. The authors will also describe the origin of the various branches of the foucauldian family to which numerous persons belong today. Some authors will testify personally on how their discovery of Charles became a source of inspiration to better live the Gospel and to be more attentive, as Jesus was,

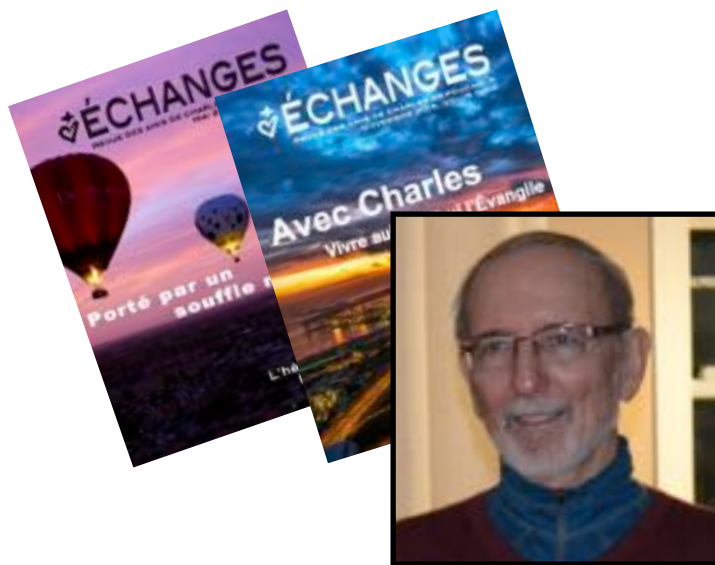
towards their brothers and sisters, particularly those who are poor and marginalized.

The writing of these texts required research, reflexion and inspiration on the part of the authors. Their wish is that your reading will help inspire you, with joy and hope.

We would gladly welcome your comments and we hope to stay in contact in the future.

Yours truly,

Yvonne Demers, co-ordinating committee



P.S. We wish to thank Gilles Robineault who graciously volunteered to translate the articles which appear in this special issue. Some of you who attended the North American regional meeting held in Montreal in June 2014, may remember his contribution in the simultaneous translation of André Beauchamp's presentations.

When Solitude Becomes An Encounter

Ciriaco(Ciro) Alessandro Piccirillo*

I believe I was born under a good star named Charles de Foucauld. He seems to have shown up at the different turning points in my life. We often hear said of Charles de Foucauld that God drew straight lines with his crooked ones. This certainly describes my life. Like Charles, one may say that my origins were not predictors of what I have become today. In many respects, my life has similarities with many facets of Charles' life and his life has completely shaped my own. Thanks to him, my spiritual retina focuses my sight on the essential, and guides me to weave fraternal bonds with people.

My roots are in universal fraternity

I was born to an immigrant Italian family which arrived in Quebec in the late 50s and early 60s. My parents fled the ravages and consequences of the war and hoped to free themselves from the material poverty that was their lot. Yet, they were very rich: rich in heart and in Christian values. This material precariousness enriched by profound family values, and moulded my personality since childhood forging a balance between my relationship with material goods and people. My family experience endowed me with a acute sensitivity towards the needs and suffering of others, and taught me the beauty of unity.

Of course, like any typical Italian son, I lived in a culture of good cuisine, calcio (soccer) and Gesù bambino (Child Jesus). Most of my time was spent at a bountiful and festive table with the famiglia, or on a football field or at the parochial church next door to our house. My

family was a very practicing Catholic churchgoing one, and had a strong devotion towards almost all the saints. These experiences prompted me to develop deep roots in the Church and embark on a road of service towards others, mainly in the fields of youth, parochial, sectorial, regional and international pastoral work.

Despite these numerous activities, I often felt solitude, and this solitude confirmed my desire for a passionate relationship with God and mankind. We find a similar solitude in Charles whose life during his infancy and youth was marked by solitude. Thanks to this solitude, I lived an even more personal relationship with God who greeted me in his heart, and this intimacy became the corner stone of my life of prayer. It is during these years of solitude that Charles entered my life, without my really willing it, and quite by chance. Suddenly, I felt less alone and a powerful Word reverberated in me.

The Gospel describes frequently how encounters with Jesus were transformative for people who were close to him. A striking example of this transforming force is found in the story of the disciples of Emmaus in Luke's Gospel (*Luke 24, 13-35*). Luke narrates how two disciples, profoundly distressed by the death of Jesus on the cross, were accompanied and comforted by a man on their way to Emmaus. His identity was revealed when he broke the bread, and this revelation of Jesus was like a blazing fire in the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus. This story of the encounter with Jesus gave rise to the birth of faith in his companions of the road, a faith filled

with understanding, life experience and a missionary passion. Similar encounters occurred in my life, particularly with Jacques Leclerc and Jean-Pierre Langlois, spiritual Brothers, both, who unmistakably motivated me to go further with Jesus and weave the Gospel in my everyday life. Today, I experience a profound calling to be a Brother for everyone, in



all circumstances and everywhere. For me, Brother Charles is the pioneer of human relations and dialogue; he is my guide in my daily efforts to develop around me a culture of universal friendship, particularly in my family and at work.

My family: my first Nazareth

I am now aged 47, married 19 years to Nadine, an exceptional woman and father of Gigi (Gianluca) who is growing faster than a

mushroom in fertile earth. In our past life, we have been blessed with countless rich experiences. However, we have also experienced moments of misunderstanding, doubt, and fragility, when faced with trials in our lives: family breakups, deaths, disease, miscarriages, and simple navigating through the routine of everyday life. My present family life is punctuated with periods of routine, and other periods with such a variety of activities that it causes chaos on the family calendar hanging on the pantry's door. This alternating between the calm and hectic episodes of my life prompt me to seek a balance between sharing my time with myself, my family, with God, and with action. Success in this balance is doubtful at times, but God certainly greets with love the good will of his children, and God knows how much I try! After all these years, Brother Charles has taught me to deal with this inner turmoil in my soul which leads me to be present both to God and to others.

My work environment: quest for universality in my university life

Since my childhood, I have been certain of three major facts: I would never be a cook, nor a swimmer, and certainly not a musician, as my inaptitude in all these fields was well-recognized all over the planet. My most important contribution to humanity is not to have chosen careers in those fields. However, I've always had an ardent passion for the sciences, and these guided my choice of career. Today, I am a titular professor of microbiology and immunology, and a researcher in immunology at the faculty of medicine at McGill University. I am also director of a research laboratory that studies the genetic and cellular foundation, and the tracking and the treatment, of numerous immune-deficient, auto-immune or inflammatory diseases. This research program provides the

opportunity to attract students, trainees and young doctors from the whole world, who wish to specialize in one or other aspect of my program. I am also director of a research centre on clinical immunology at the McGill University Health Centre, which includes a large number of laboratories, each with its specialty and medical objective. During my university career, I have had the opportunity of acquiring an international reputation, which has very often led me to deliver conferences or consultations in hospitals, universities, research centres or government agencies in many countries. These activities often have the goal of informing on recent progress in our research projects and offer new strategies in the areas of clinical practical experimentation and intervention. Generally, the quest for the unknown, the understanding of the incomprehensible and the pursuit of the microcosm in order to understand the macrocosm, are central components of my university life. Working in the university environment is very trying and implies numerous challenges and, too often, insoluble situations: how to identify the molecular root of a rare inflammatory syndrome? Nothing works? What new therapeutic treatment for a patient? How to react towards an employee who multiplies coffee breaks at the expense of his responsibilities? How to assist a trainee who seeks to reset his career after years of sacrifices? Governments cut (again and again) operating budgets in research activities. Where can money be found immediately to save a job, a project, a student scholarship or replace state of the art equipment, which has just broken down? How to resolve a conflict between two workers? High yield result expectations are the rule in my work and I do my best with simple strategies. In all circumstances, I reach out to the person and

establish contact, despite the 'gulf' I must cross to greet that person. Such a meeting sometimes requires the necessary breaching of power or cultural barriers and I always hope the acquired mutual confidence and trust will bring us to walk together towards a solution.

In my work environment, I am unmistakably and often challenged by my own powerlessness and my own frailty. I must accept not knowing everything and then occasionally not knowing how to solve a specific problem, in which case, I refer to God asking him to enlighten me in future situations. How to find Jesus in such a context? In such circumstances, I remind myself of the situations Brother Charles had to cope with during his years in the desert, particularly at Beni-Abbes: find the love of God through every person I meet and through the various types of poverty I witness. In a work environment such as mine, there exists an unrelenting pressure for progress at all costs, for the glory it procures, and for the absolute victory of science over all other dimensions of human life. The example of Brother Charles taught me to realize that God is already present in each human being and that He calls upon us to meet him in each person. This contact, which is often ordinary, constitutes an enrichment in my work experience. If we could only imitate Jesus in our Nazareth, our example alone could project the Gospel at the heart of our life!

The urgency of being a Brother today: answer the inner calling.

My familial and professional Nazareth highlights my questions about my faith in Jesus and his Gospel: who is this Jesus in the depth of my heart who beckons me to follow and serve Him with love? How to blend in his presence at the heart of my Nazareth? How to spread hope in God at the heart of our values

in frail situations? Personally, my journeying within the *Lay Fraternity* plays a vital role in learning to accept and grow in this questioning. The past and present members of my *Fraternity* are real Sisters and Brothers who can assist me in discerning the presence of God in my life. For me, the *Fraternity* is a way of life where God invites me to free myself of all the non-essentials to better greet him in myself.

The world we live in nowadays thirsts for humanity, and the life of Brother Charles illustrates the extent to which he is and always will be a model for men and women of our time. My personal and professional experience lead me to believe in the urgency to be a Brother, all the time, and fulfill the Gospel whenever the occasion presents itself. My experience in the *Fraternity* has revealed to me how the simplicity

of Nazareth is necessary to greet the presence of God in ourselves and to witness the One who inhabits all others. *Fraternity* life welcomes Jesus in our life, and our life shows the way towards the renewal of a dialogue with others. The encounter with people is an essential passage to God and must be considered a source of growth without which we could not live. In all my duties and activities, I bond with Jesus to better live a universal fraternity with my environment. My experience in the *Fraternity* through the years brings me to draw on the mystery of the Incarnation and gives me a missionary momentum forward to answer the call within me to become an unconditional Brother for all.

*Professor, immunologist, researcher.

Brief Outline Of A Commitment To “A Hidden Life”

André Vidricaire *

The imitation of a *hidden life in Nazareth* is a vocation. To what reality do the words “hidden life” and “Nazareth” refer? What is their meaning according to Charles de Foucauld? What was his intuition? I would like to describe how the meaning Charles gave to these words opens a totally new spiritual space. This extraordinary discovery forces me to reassess my personal commitment and view it with a critical eye and discover what new meaning I will give to it. I hope that sharing this personal quest will shed light on the Nazareth way of life proposed by Charles, a way of life which becomes a fruitful form of spirituality attainable by lay people.

Hidden life = Nazareth = Visitation

For Charles de Foucauld, the ideal of “a hidden life” and the ideal of Nazareth, which can both be lived anywhere, are tantamount to living “the life of the Virgin Mary during the mystery of the Visitation” (letter from Charles to Father Huvelin, May 7, 1900). What is the meaning of this? In a conference given in Montreal on November 2015, Little Sister Kathy sees the Visitation as a distinct salutation, which is a creative encounter of Mary with Elizabeth where the reason for meeting from either part is not set on pursuing a specific goal, or an ambition. “The Visitation” does not consist primarily of rendering a service, helping,



assisting, supporting, consoling or exerting an attraction. “The Visitation” is an encounter, the awakening in both parties of the best in each, surpassing the I/me relationship and creating something original and new.

Let us follow a few basic and relevant texts written in 1898, 1899, 1905, 1907 by Charles de Foucauld.

“The purpose of Mary’s Visitation at her Cousin Elizabeth’s house is not so they can console themselves mutually, and even less that Mary give material charity and assistance to her cousin during the last months of her pregnancy. It is much more than that. Mary visits to sanctify Saint John and proclaim the Good News to him, not in words but by carrying silently Jesus next to him in his dwelling”. (*Considérations sur les fêtes de l’année*. juillet-July 2 1898, p.472.)

“During the last five and a half years, I have searched and prayed for the best way of glorifying God. It now seems to me that the best way of glorifying Him was by doing what the Blessed Virgin Mary had done during the Visitation. Without leaving her hidden life, maintaining her silence, she sanctified Saint John’s house by carrying Jesus and by practicing the evangelical virtues. Following

Mary’s example, let us sanctify souls while maintaining silence, by introducing among the infidel nations, with a small number of brothers, JESUS in the Holy-Sacrament, also by practicing the evangelical virtues by imitating the hidden life of Our Lord. For me who has not received the vocation of an apostolical life, I have thought for the last five years and a half that this is the best I can do for the glory of God.” (Charles de Foucauld. *Introduction au RÈGLEMENT PROVISOIRE ET À LA RÈGLE DÉFINITIVE*. 6 January 1899, text published by Six in the *Revue d’Ascétique et de Mystique* n. 141, janv.-mars 1960).

March 25, 1905: “Visitation: a lesson again in humility and charity: whoever is filled with me is full of charity and humility, because «Deus caritas est », and I am gentle and humble in heart...As soon as Mary is full of me, she is also filled with charity and humility, she is burning with the passion to do good to Elizabeth and her entourage, and consequently she humbles herself to the point of visiting Elizabeth first.” (C. de Foucauld: *L’esprit de Jésus*. Nouvelle cité, 2005, p. 255-256).

“It is most pleasant for me to write today: it is the feast of the Visitation... To carry Jesus in silence to the infidel peoples and to sanctify them silently through the presence of the Holy Tabernacle, as the Virgin Mary sanctified the home of John by bringing Jesus.” (C. de Foucauld to Mgr. Guérin July 2, 1907, in *Correspondances sahariennes*, Paris, Cerf, p. 530).

Personal testimony

Difficult circumstances, which included the death of someone close, and distressing setbacks, forced me to reexamine my lifestyle and led me to become involved in a co-

operative housing project where I lived for 25 years. Inspired by Foucauld's spirituality, I decided to live in a co-op located in a poor district. Such was the meaning I wanted to give my life. I realized quickly that I had to 'learn'. In the ensuing years, instead of trying to **act for** the co-op members, I learned how to **act with** them in various assemblies, committee meetings, various tasks, community work, and festivities. But with time, numerous difficulties encountered in my 'acting with' tempted me to abandon this life...because my apprenticeship was difficult and seemed endless. If I persevered, it is due to Father Guy Bouillé who, during all these years, VISITED me regularly, as a companion in what I was doing, being and hoping. Guy's VISITS were not meant to instruct or advise. Like Mary's visit to Elizabeth, his visits were an experience in close communion where each sought to live, be and become. We were two friends whose close unity made me feel a mutual vibrant energy. The contact with this priest, who was a member of *Jesus Caritas*, prompted me to **exist at once and in the same place** with him and all the members of the co-op, just being there in all simplicity, living a spiritual experience before rendering service or aid.

The spirituality of the *hidden life* in Nazareth=to visit=to make oneself close in body, heart and soul.

Now that Guy Bouillé has passed away and his attentive and constant presence is no more, I realize that he had a great capacity to be present, not only in words, but by example. Guy's life "led in the spirit of the Visitation", to quote little sister Kathy, has taught me that this spirituality, which is at first "**a movement forwards in order to make oneself close in body, heart and spirit**", is an extraordinary way for lay people who are seeking to give meaning to their continual contact with others. The lay person does not have ecclesial responsibilities (preaching, ministries, managing charitable organizations), nor the vocation of retiring from the world, but rather the duty to join the world and participate in its continuous creation in harmony with others. The lay person is devoted to visit, passionately develop a direct and close contact with others, and in these living relationships, discover mankind's mutual universes and the rich values which exist and are expressed in each being. In other words, as Mary with Elizabeth and Charles de Foucauld with the Tuareg, the lay person who adopts the spirituality of the hidden life, "before doing good deeds and helping others, will empathise with his neighbor, share his sorrow and his destiny". (Jacques Maritain: *Oec*, IX, p379-80, and « À propos de la vocation des Petits Frères de Jésus », *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, April 2, 1981, p.53-69.)

*Retired teacher



Following Christ In Passing

Jean-Pierre Langlois *

When I agreed to write this article, never did I think that I would be moving to Tamanrasset in the following autumn! A sign that I am called to become a nomad much more than I ever thought. With God's help!

"Humanity began with its' feet" maintains anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan. The upright position and the ability to walk with two feet are characteristic of mankind. Learning to walk is a key stage and a major psychomotor apprenticeship for the young child. Once this phase is mastered, the human being acquires little by little its liberty and dignity. And this will last until old age.

The human being, created in God's image as Genesis states, is an upright standing being. He sets out to discover the surrounding environment. He moves, he walks. And he seeks a partner, man and woman. Parents and children. Singular and plural. Cultures and society. Nations and universes.

The Coran possibly refers to this reality by underlining that the human being is a



«caliphate» of God, translated traditionally by the «lieutenant» subdued to his master, but it rather means the «heir» of the Merciful. This is very close to Saint Paul's statements: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." (Rom 8,17).

The value of social pastoral ministry is judged by the nature of the places where one's feet are present. We think with our feet. In the light of this factor, we observe that after his conversion, Charles de Foucauld chose a path demanding a life characterized by simplicity, by a communion with the Eternal and in humble daily services to the poor. These options were incarnated differently and progressively depending on his personal evolution and on the social environment he lived in, and all the while becoming deeper and more unified; becoming with time more and more universal.

Nomads are infiltrating everywhere

In his book *L'Homme nomade* published in 2003, Jacques Attali observed that only the living species adapted to migrations have survived successfully until now. He also observes that world globalization is creating on contemporary earth a new kind of nomad. As the decline of the American Empire is progressing, we witness the rise of three nomadic forces striving to replace it: the global earth marketplace, planetary aspirations for democracy...and faith.

The present wave of migrants seeking to enter in northern countries, especially in Europe and

the USA, are prophetic of a trend which, we can expect, will grow.

We witness disputes amongst sedentaries and refugees, nationalistic or religious xenophobia, wherefrom the fear of terrorist attacks. We also witness Donald Trump entertaining the fear of clandestine Latino migrants on this side of the Atlantic. Elsewhere, right wing forces are on the rise as defenders of nations and identities.

We also witness the invading forces of new technologies which impact upon our lives at work, in our leisure activities and in our personal and intimate life: Uber, cell phones, social media, internet, etc... Publicity targets us with ads adapted to our tastes. Information gathering agencies and services gather information on our personal electronic exchanges in their information and metadata banks.

Within this new and concrete reality evolves a strange ballet between sedentaries attached to stable institutions, and nomads who are constantly seeking other options elsewhere.

Brother Charles seemed unstable in his quest for Christ. From France to Syria, from Palestine to Algeria, from monastic life to a sort of hermitage, from hospitality to the construction of a defensive fort, he was constantly reacting to people, circumstances and events.

Sensitive to the harmful consequences of colonial France, he was committed to the development and respect of indigenous cultures, and also, to end the control exerted by France. The existing market system did not impress him and a type of self-government seemed desirable.

“The oppressive presence of market societies - and all societies have something to sell - lead to consider people as objects and lead also to

classify things according to their scarceness and people according to their power. Jesus has a child's heart and does not distinguish among people. He, Jesus, is the man who walks, a nomad, a famous nomad, what a nomad!” (Christian Bobin, *L'Homme qui marche*, 1955, p.15.)

Jesus, the Eternal Way and Guide

Isn't the One we believe in always on the move to meet human beings here and there and proclaim the Kingdom? He is the Way.

In *Heureux les nomades* written by Rémi Parent and published in 2001, we read: “The Eternal Way has become the Eternal Guide. Jesus does not protect us from wounds and suffering. He proposes an opening, an Easter that opens the way. In other words, the Eternal Guide always offers us the possibility of passing from death to life.” (p.92)

This quote marks our entrance into the Easter of Jesus: “The Easter bliss does not hinge on succeeding in this or that performance, or reaching a major achievement, even in the pursuit of virtues. I am a nomad because of a wager which binds all my being since I trust my whole life on someone whose Easter is continually opening the way to tenderness, the way of my humanity.” (ibid p.149-150 .) Hence, to be a pilgrim is to leave the static world towards the meandering road of the unforeseen, abandoning my self, accepting to wander off the road.

Monsignor Albert Rouet dared to write the following: “Man is a precarious, frail and wounded creature and I believe that this is the way through which the divine enters...this gaping opening makes of man an unfinished being filled with desire.” (*La chance d'un christianisme fragile*, Bayard, 2001, p.23.)



He continues with audacity: “I wish for a Church that is close to mankind, and does not hide its’ frailty, admits it does not know everything and is willing to question itself...the pertinence of words of faith is to be in tune with the desires of mankind.” (Ibid. 57)

A wish? Yes, because Christians wish stability. If the Church is willing to change and follow the inspiration of the Holy Ghost who guides towards those in the periphery, as Pope Francis declares, then it must move from the temple to the mobile home.

Can we pretend to have evolved from the practicing believer to the pilgrim? The practicing faithful are deemed static, attached to a visible church, with an unshakeable faith, well seated in every meaning of the word....On the contrary, the Christian pilgrim follows a spiritual itinerary, both individual- no one can walk in another’s place- and at the same time, supported by a

group, a community, which accompanies the pilgrim and ensures continuity in time.

In his book, *Une Église Sans domicile* Alain Roy states that “ In a Church that will be more missionary, the Word will prevail. To a society in search of meaning, the Word and fraternity will be the two answers proposed to mankind....is it not the Church’s mission to communicate the meaning God gives to our life and his love for us?” (Mediaspaul, 2010, p. 52)

Brother Charles personified the freedom of movement of the loving heart which was his trademark. He was remarkably devoted to the Word of God and to Jesus.

We cannot stress enough how he valued fraternal life, even if it materialized quite differently than he had expected. The Word and Fraternity, an interior and exterior mobility, summarize very well his inspiring intuitions even today.

Going beyond oneself

In his book *Les trois mouvements de la vie spirituelle*, Henri Nouwen writes: “ (...) that spiritual life is a perpetual interior mobility, a permanent passage from isolation to an abandonment confident in God, from hostility to hospitality, from the meditated Word to prayer.” (Bellarmin, 1998)

The Lord wants to give us the courage to enter the desert of isolation where we will find his Presence. He wants to give us the power to be able to pass from the experience of ‘feeling much alone’ to that of ‘feeling well, alone’.

God came amongst us as a pilgrim to make us realize how the other is a holy land. His Spirit prompts us to be sociable with the other, the foreigner, and become welcoming rather than hostile. The ‘other’ is disturbing but his

difference may enrich me.

God came as a pilgrim to entrust his Word to us, to guide us away from the illusion that we capable managing alone, to create a confident alliance with Him.

Did you notice how all the various perspectives developed in this text blend well with the way opened by Brother Charles?!!

Maybe this is the discovery which is waiting mysteriously for me in Algeria in 2017. Follow Jesus... by going beyond myself!

*Priest of the Montreal diocese and member of *Jesus Caritas* for many years.

Madeleine and René

Françoise Derooy-Pineau

Madeleine Hutin
(Paris, April 26, 1898- Tre Fontane, November 6, 1989)

René Voillaume,
(Versailles, 1905- Aix-en-Provence, May 13, 2003)

In 1921, a biography is published which literally resuscitates a dead person lost in the Sahara sands for 5 years: “Charles de Foucauld, explorateur du Maroc, ermite du Sahara. Charles de Foucauld, explorer of Morocco, hermit of the desert.” The author, René Bazin, member of the *Académie française*, was one of the most renowned French authors at the time. Louis Massignon, Charles’ closest friend, who had taken upon himself the responsibility of perpetuating his memory lest he be forgotten, prompted Bazin to write Charles’ biography. Louis was a member of *L’Union Spirituelle*, a group founded by Charles de Foucauld, and which, at his death in 1916, numbered approximately 50 members from the clergy, religious orders, and the laity.

Three years after the end of the First World War, Charles’ understanding of Jesus and mankind and his very personal way of practicing

his apostolate of goodness and love impassioned his readers. A seed was sown and grew progressively in French areas, nourished by the extraordinary figure that was Charles and by the strikingly new and exciting spiritual horizons he created. Everyone dreamt of his or her Charles.

In Paris, a woman aged 23 and a man aged 16 devoured Bazin’s book. This discovery overwhelmed the lives of Madeleine Hutin and René Voillaume, who then set out on a journey following Charles’ spiritual path.

Little Sister Madeleine

Seven years later, in 1928, Madeleine Hutin is 30 years old. She taught in Nantes at a school run by the *Sisters of the Sacred-Heart*. In 1936, she suffered from arthritis and her doctor recommended the Sahara. She moved to Boghari in Algeria. In 1938, during a pilgrimage

at El Golea at Charles de Foucauld's tomb, she had a brief encounter with René Voillaume. The same year, she entered the novitiate of the *White Sisters* near Alger.

The second World War began in 1939. Madeleine (41 years old) made her religious vows on September 8, 1939 under the name Petite Soeur Madeleine de Jésus (Little Sister Madeleine of Jesus). This ceremony which took place at Touggourt, an oasis in the Sahara, was judged to be the founding moment of the *Fraternity of the Little Sisters of Jesus*. The *Little Sisters of Jesus* were henceforth destined to an extraordinary future in the world, constantly at the service of the poorest wherever they lived, always in a spirit of humility, discretion and love. During the Second World War, Madeleine travelled through France to make the fraternity known. In 1941, she founded a fraternity at Tubet near Aix-en-Provence.

In 1944, the year that the worker-priests began their revolutionary ministry in France, during a trip to Algeria, Little Sister Madeleine met René Voillaume again. The encounter occurred in El Abiodh where Voillaume, with his companions, was experimenting since 1933, with the cloistered formula of *Les Petits Frères du Sacré-Coeur de Jésus* (*Little Brothers of the Sacred-Heart of Jesus*). That same year, she met with pope Pius XII for the first time. In 1947, the Archbishop elevated the *Little Sisters of Jesus* fraternity to the status of a diocesan congregation. At Aix-en-Provence, Madeleine founded the first worker's fraternity. In 1948, fraternities were set up in the Middle-East. In 1949, the first gipsy fraternity was founded. By then, there were more than one hundred Little Sisters. On Christmas day, 1949, Madeleine retired as superior general.

In 1950, Madeleine undertook a world tour. She founded a settlement among the Pygmies in western Congo-Kinshasa. Small fraternities opened in Europe and Asia. In 1952, in South America, she established small communities in the favelas of Rio and among the Amerindians of the Amazon. That same year, the *Little Sisters* settled in Montreal. In 1953, little sister Madeleine visited Indochina, Southern Africa and Chili, where she set up other small communities amongst the neediest. In 1953-1954, she began another world tour and, in 1956, she made her first trip behind the *Iron Curtain*. Everywhere, young indigenous girls joined the sisters, who lived like the locals. This family type habitat – the first in the history of female congregations - will eventually be adopted by all active sisters. The creativity of Little Sister Madeleine and her companions was endless and resourceful. By 1959, there were 800 Little Sisters in the world.



In 1964, the community attained the status of 'pontifical right' and settled in Rome (Tre Fontane). Popes visited: Paul VI in 1973, John Paul II in 1985. The constitution was approved officially in 1988.

Westerners are fewer in numbers in 2016 but the *Little Sisters* from other countries cover the planet, especially in regions of high risk. On September 6, 1989, Little Sister Madeleine died at Tre Fontane, exhausted by the immense work she accomplished.

Father René Voillaume

René Voillaume, born in 1905 at Versailles, was searching for his way when he discovered René Bazin's biography of Charles. A short while before this discovery, "(...) a secret, personal and spiritual event had made him understand that Christ wanted him to consecrate all his life to Him and to his Eucharist". He entered the *Issy-les Moulineaux Seminary* near Paris and was ordained in the priesthood on June 29, 1929. All the while, René Bazin's book kept

troubling him. He was attracted by the *White Father*. According to Congar, after a great deal of reflection and many difficulties, Voillaume was enlightened by the second mystical lighthouse of modern times, Thérèse de Lisieux. He finally found his way. "In Charles, de Foucauld's life description, I discovered, summarized in one, the three callings which attracted me successively in my life: become a monk, a missionary and a worshipper of the Blessed Sacrament", he wrote in Fez, Morocco, in 1995.

On September 8, 1933, Voillaume and four of his colleagues, met at Sacré Coeur de Monmartre Church, and adopted one of the vestments worn by Charles de Foucauld. And off they went to El-Abiodh-Sidi-Cheikh, a Sahara oasis. This fraternity will give birth to the *Little Brothers of Jesus*. The torments of the Second World War prompted them to abandon their cloistered environment and plunge in a humanity in search of a profound renewal of itself.

In the early Fifties, René Voillaume assembled the various spiritual experiences of the first *Little Brothers* in a book entitled *Au Coeur des masses* (later published in English as *Seeds of the Desert*). He introduces the spirituality of Nazareth at the heart of ongoing debates in the Church. The timing was excellent when young Christians sought a spiritual life with depth and commitment. A great number of youths who were inspired by the Gospel but not attracted by traditional religious practices would be awakened by this book, and hear the call of the *Little Brothers*.

The quest for evangelical practices adapted to contemporary societies will lead to the creation of a variety of groups inspired by Foucauld's spirituality: in 1956, the *Little Brothers of the Gospel*, and in 1963, the *Little Sisters of the*



Gospel. And one must not forget the proliferation of the *Lay Fraternities* and *Priest Fraternities*.

“Brother René represented the «father image» and he had the training and qualities to be such. He also had a timid temperament. Sister Madeleine represented the ‘mother image’, warm, open, intuitive and docile in answer to the inspiration of the Spirit; despite her fragile health she was firm and audacious in pursuing her projects. René and Madeleine were different but wise enough to recognize they were complementary one to the other”. (Frère

Maurice Maurin, *Vivre la Fraternité au coeur du monde*. L’Harmattan, 2012, p. 82.)

On October 2001, Brother René retired at the Little Sisters of Jesus in Aix-en-Provence where he died on May 13, 2003.

According to the French web site on the Centennial (centenaire.charlesdefoucauld.org), the greater spiritual family of Charles de Foucauld numbers more than 13 000 members, spread in 20 groups today around the world. Amongst these, there are 225 *Little Brothers* in 37 countries and 1193 *Little Sisters* in 60 countries.

The Impact Of A Biography

Pierre Gaudette

René Bazin, *Charles de Foucauld, explorateur du Maroc, ermite du Sahara*.(1)

When Charles de Foucauld died on December 1st, 1916, he left a very small legacy, one association with only 49 members *L’Union des frères et des soeurs du Sacré-Coeur de Jésus*. The priests to whom he had tasked the expansion of the *Union* had not been very active, if at all, because they did not believe in its future. A daily newspaper, *Le Temps* did publish, on January 9th, an article announcing his death. It mentioned his linguistic studies, his exploration of Morocco, his life amongst the Tuareg and his ardent patriotism. There was no mention of his profound religious experience. Will this experience remain a secret shared only by a few parents and friends? Fortunately, Louis Massignon, a member of the *Union* and a close friend and disciple of Charles with whom

he had shared an abundant correspondence of 80 letters, stepped forward. This married layman, who had a profound knowledge of Islam, convinced the *Union* leadership that the priority was not to recruit members but to sponsor the writing of a biography of Charles de Foucauld. He believed that this publication would attract new members.

The impact of a biography

Massignon contacted Louis Bazin, member of the *Académie française* and known author of novels, essays and travel articles. Bazin was a defender of the traditional values of rural life and Catholicism. Foucauld had previously contacted him. His wish was that the author publish “an easy to read book which would

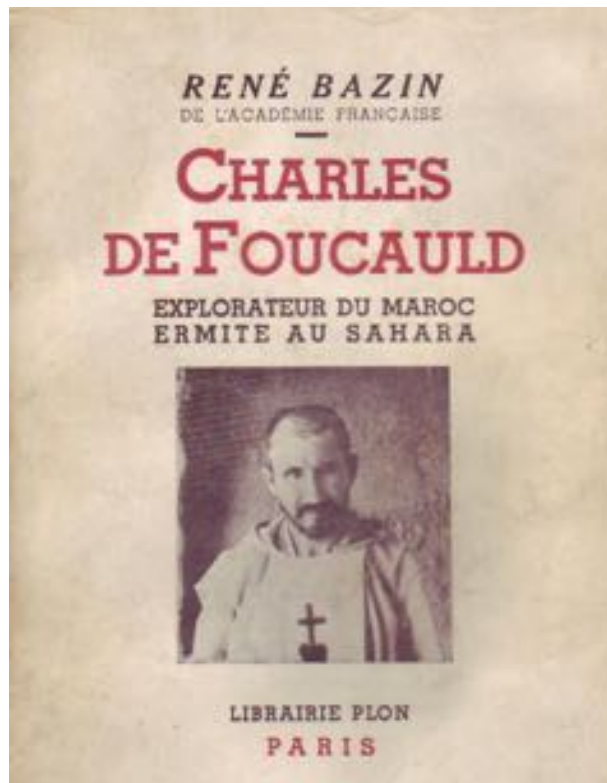
show the way to live”, a book which, “in the name of republican and Christian fraternity”, would remind the French people of its duties towards the Muslims living in the French colonies of North Africa. Father Voillaume stated that Bazin “set out with all his heart. He interviewed people in Paris who knew him. Despite his age, he was 72, he went to Africa and followed (Foucauld’s) footsteps right up to Béni-Abbès”. A real pilgrimage, this voyage allowed the collection of numerous details on Charles’ life from the *White Fathers* and French officers.

Titled *Charles de Foucauld, explorateur du Maroc, ermite du Sahara*, the biography was published in September 1921 (*Charles de Foucauld, Hermit and Explorer*, the English translation was published in 1923). It was an immediate best-seller. Critics were favorable, Massignon deemed it a “dense and profound study”. Many positive reviews were published in the press; Charles’ parents and friends were happy and proud. Within a few years, 200,000 copies were sold.

Reasons for the book’s success in libraries

How to explain such a success? We can propose a few reasons.

First there is the author’s reputation. Bazin had already published numerous works, novels, essays, and travel articles, which won him many prizes. He was read by a large public, mainly Catholics who were bound to traditional values,



the family, and the aristocracy. His writing was simple and elegant. His biography of Foucauld describes abundantly and with clarity the places where he journeyed. Numerous paragraphs describe in detail his spiritual evolution although this is not always based on reliable sources. The writer of novels who is familiar with movements of the human soul improvises creatively due to a lack of written sources. As a result, some critics chastised the author for

not having sufficiently expressed Foucauld’s struggles of the soul, his stubbornness in pursuing certain dreams, and his resistance to some of Father Huvelin’s (his spiritual director) advice. A reader of Charles’ biography, Dominique Casajus wrote that he was “left with the impression that after leaving father Huvelin’s confessional on that day in October 1886, life was always easy for Charles.” Another critic wrote: “I would like to know what was God’s journey through this soul. The author shows the point of departure and the point of arrival. We know nothing about what happened along the way”. (R.Kemp, in Pouplin 1983: 42.) (2) This way of cutting corners was fashionable in those days, and Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus was regaled with the same criticism.

The image of Charles as model soldier and explorer stimulated the nationalist fiber of Bazin’s readers. After World War 1, France “wished to expand its values throughout its large colonial empire, convinced that France’s destiny was to civilize and free from their

obscurantism, the millions of people under its tutelage” (3). The perception was that, other than his faith, in Foucauld “the blood of France spoke more highly than anything else”. (Bazin, 1921:13). René Bazin glorifies the explorer and the soldier personified by Charles de Foucauld. The subtitle of his book “explorer of Morocco” bears witness to that. More than 80 pages cover his exploration of Morocco. There are long and detailed descriptions of his travels in the Sahara, his relationship with the French Army,



René Bazin

his desire to make Christians aware the importance of converting the Tuareg with prayer and good example. All this was susceptible to stir curiosity and muster the patriotic and Christian fiber of numerous readers in those days. Some will be touched so deeply they will seek in Charles a lifelong inspiration.

For beyond the adventures of Charles’ life lies the essential: the depth of an exceptional person totally devoted to the quest of the absolute. Bazin succeeded in communicating this essential quality. Foucauld’s soul is

expressed through the numerous quotations of his works inserted by Bazin in the text, and through the description of his original personal development, which illustrates the tenacity of his initial commitment. Brother Charles is a soul afire whose life experience can only incite any person searching for God to walk in his tracks and become his disciple. Many readers were fascinated by the quality of his faith. They could pursue their interest in Charles by reading a collection of spiritual writings. Bazin introduced the book thus: “The characteristics of the *Écrits spirituels*, are the following: a faith which is total, invincible and Roman; a tender piety like that of children when they run with extended arms towards the ones they love; a total humility rooted in life experience; and finally, on a personal note, numerous and inspiring words of bravery.” (4)

Influence on the life of three prominent leaders

Reading Charles’ biography will prove to be a decisive moment in the lives of many people. This included men and women seeking the absolute, desirous to follow Jesus in a radical way, but often unable to pursue this goal because of poor health. They are often attracted by the Arab and Muslim populations of the French colonies. Among these disciples, we select three major figures.

First there was Albert Peyriguère, a diocesan priest who was also a teacher in a seminary. He thought of joining one of two monasteries, *La Trappe* or *La Chartreuse*. In 1920, after the Great War, he wrote the following to a friend: “The war woke me up or rather made more specific my quest for a more audacious, more conquering, true life of an evangelist, who, leaving everything behind, strives forward in vast spaces to preach the good Master to those

poor souls who ignore his existence. My heart has already left Europe and all my dreams are turned towards this immense Africa where millions of poor souls await the missionaries.” (Voillaume, 84) He planned to join the *White Fathers*, but a serious case of dysentery put an end to this project. Upon reading René Bazin’s biography of Charles, he saw more clearly. “Everything is enlightened”, he professed. He wrote, “Have you read the admirable life of Charles de Foucauld, that brilliant officer who became a hermit in the Sahara? How he wished for disciples to join him, yet none ever did so during his lifetime.” Peyriguère desired to join two priests who had decided to live according to the rules that Foucauld had elaborated in 1899. He wrote, “The life challenge is beautiful : to leave your country to go and live amongst the poorest natives a life of prayer, manual work, sacrifice, poverty without any direct effort at conversion, but simply by putting them in contact with Christ through the example of our life as best we can in a spirit of total charity.”(Voillaume, 87) Father Peyriguère died as a hermit in 1959, after having lived 30 years with a Berber tribe of the Middle Atlas region of Morocco.

Another disciple of Charles, René Voillaume, after having followed a path which led him to the *White Fathers*, discovered his vocation after having read Bazin. “I was very enthusiastic about this ideal to the extent I remember very well where I was when I discovered this book (...) I felt an interior shock (...) My imagination was overwhelmed by Charles’ adventurous exploration of Morocco, his travels to the heart of the desert. Without my realizing it, this type of life fulfilled my missionary aspirations, my attraction to monastic life and adoration of the Blessed Sacrement.” (Voillaume, 109). He then joined the *White Fathers*, but then had to leave for health reasons. Always hoping to lead a life

like Charles’, he shared this ideal with colleagues from the Major Seminary. Coincidentally, this group discovered the rules written by Charles in 1899 for the religious order he wished to establish, *the Small Brothers of the Sacred-Heart*. “This turn of events determined our future”, wrote Father Voillaume. “We were full of enthusiasm and seduced by the ideal life proposed in these rules. We were



attracted mainly by the ideal of humility, fraternal charity and evangelical simplicity emanating from these rules.” (137). After abiding for a time by the *Rule Book* of 1899, the group developed an original way of living Foucauld’s ideal among the poor and became the *Little Brothers of Jesus*. A meeting with sister Madeleine would influence Father Voillaume in accomplishing this transition.

During her youth, Madeleine Hutin dreamt of going to Africa to live in service of the poor and the needy. But she had to wait until her twenties before fulfilling her wish. Much of her family had been decimated during the war. A tuberculous pleurisy made it impossible for her to depart for Africa, and then she had to take care of her ailing mother. Luckily, a flicker of light brought hope to this somber period. She wrote, “A faint light enlightened this somber period, the discovery of Bazin’s biography of Foucauld in whom I found the ideal I dreamt of: a life according to the Gospel, a life amid abandoned

people... and mostly love in all its splendor: Jesus Caritas, Jesus Love...And I begged the Lord to hasten the hour of my departure for Islamic land.”(4) After 20 years of waiting, her doctor diagnosed a severe case of degenerative arthritis: “Nothing can be done

attracted disciples beyond these considerations, was the ideal of an austere life totally dedicated to the poor, a life rooted in the love of He who chose to occupy the last place, *Jesus- Caritas*.



unless you move to a country where it never rains, not even a single drop...like ... the Sahara, she interrupts, where I’ve been dreaming of going for the last twenty years”. And she established the “*Fraternity of Little Sisters* who would live as nomads in the Sahara, consecrated solely to Islam, living a part of the year in tents, poor, very poor.” Little Sister Madeleine then rapidly expanded the fraternities throughout the world.

Most of the first disciples were therefore deeply influenced by the commitment of Charles de Foucauld towards the French colonies of North Africa, and his appeal to all Frenchmen to become involved in the social, moral and intellectual progress of the indigenous population. (Voillaume, 75). What

There came a moment where Father Voillaume and his companions struggled in their effort to choose among the various Rules written by Charles. Little Sister Madeleine succeeded in avoiding the trap of conformity by writing the following text filled with wisdom: “Charles de Foucauld, because he is a living Gospel, is essentially a life, and if the accent on rules stopped this life to grow, spread and expand, it would be tantamount to preventing the sap to flow in abundance.” (Voillaume, 298).

(1) Many quotations were taken from René Voillaume, *Charles de Foucauld et ses premiers disciples*, Bayard Éditions-Centurion, 1998.

(2) “René Bazin et Charles de Foucauld : un rendez-vous manqué.” *IMPACTS*. Revue de l’Université catholique de l’Ouest, L’Harmattan, 2000, 34(2/4) pp.149-163.

(3) Alain Blanchette. “Lire Charles de Foucauld, d’hier à aujourd’hui. Reading Charles de Foucauld : from yesterday to now.” *Revue Échanges*, mai 2015.

(4) *Du Sahara au monde entier*. Nouvelle Cité, 1981, p.15.

The Passion According To Charles

Yvonne Demers

On the very day father Huvelin ordered Charles to kneel and confess his sins and then receive Holy Communion, the heart of the penitent was filled with an extraordinary grace. It was the grace of conversion and the birth of a magnificent love. A passionate love for the person Jesus, a total and absolute love, which would translate into radical life choices and rigorous commitments, a life totally dedicated to the contemplation of his Beloved and the imitation of his life as he perceives it in Nazareth. "At the very outset of love, we imitate and contemplate: imitation and contemplation constitute necessarily and naturally integral parts of love (...) imitation is union, the unification with another person through resemblance; contemplation is the union of one being with another through knowledge and eyesight (...) Let us therefore imitate Jesus through love (...) let us contemplate Jesus through love (...)" (*Oeuvres spirituelles*, p.204).

With solitude, silence and prayer, amongst the Trappists, Charles learns to deepen his love and closeness with Jesus. But at first, he had to accomplish the dolorous sacrifice of definitely breaking with his family, thus following the call of the Gospel: "You will leave the company of your father, your mother, your family and your fields (...)" He must leave his family, disappear socially to belong to God only, he must live the sacrifice of separation to "console Jesus and accomplish the desires of his Heart." We then witness the beginnings of important elements of his devotion and spirituality: a devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a life filled with sacrifices to better empathize with the suffering of Christ on the cross and console Him.

Although Charles does not regret having chosen the Trappist cloister and monastic life, his profound aspiration to imitate the life of poverty, humility and abjection of Jesus of Nazareth is not met. He wishes to establish a religious order of brothers consecrated to the realization of this ideal in a radical fashion. Father Huvelin understands that the soul of his protégé is not where it should be; he counsels Charles to follow his heart's desire, but at the same time, resist the creation of a religious order. Charles dresses like a miserable laborer and knocks at the door of the *Poor Clares of Nazareth*.

Among the *Poor Clares*, Charles writes to his cousin Marie de Bondy, "This is exactly what I



was looking for.” For four years, Charles lives the life of a poor hermit, his days consisting of manual labor, fasting and hours spent in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. His is a life of reclusion and strict observance of the rules he had established for an eventual religious order; a life which allows for many hours spent in prayer and adoration of the Eucharist. In the convent of the *Poor Clares*, Charles has found the ideal environment to strenghten his link with God, and to live intensely his loving passion for Jesus.

During this ‘retreat’ close to his Beloved, a new calling emerges which will guide the rest of his life: charity towards his human brothers, as if God had led Charles to Nazareth to bestow him with grace in the desert before sending him on a new mission. “Our hearts can not be afire for God and icy for mankind, nor afire for mankind and icy for God...If it is warm for God, it will be warm for mankind, if it is warm for mankind, it will be warm for God...Consequently, if we wish to acquire love for God, the best way is to set out loving mankind.” (*Aux plus petits de mes frères* p. 138-139)

In this frame of mind, Charles decides to become a priest to do like Jesus and go towards those who are lost, and guide them back to the fold. He wishes to evangelize. He wishes to go “where needs are greater...where Jesus would reach out to the sheep most lost, the sickest brothers, the most abandoned, those without pastors, those who sit in complete darkness, those who are threatened by death, those most captive of demons.”



Having always maintained that his calling was to imitate Jesus’ hidden life in Nazareth, Charles becomes conscious of a new and irrepressible calling, a life as missionary and apostle of the Faith. At Beni Abbes, he will experience tension between a life led for God alone and the presence of ‘souls in need’. Wary of respecting every element of the strict monastic life he imposed on himself, he must at the same time answer to all passersby who knock at his door ‘by the dozen’ every hour. He is constantly interrupted in his life of solitude and prayer, yet he still finds time to greet, lend a welcoming ear and render service in the spirit of He who said, “What you do for the least of mine, you do unto me.”

A pilgrimage to the Hoggar region of the Sahara will reaffirm his consecration to a missionary life. He now believes that it is God’s will to consecrate himself to the evangelization of the

Tuareg with whom he decides to live forever. He fully recognizes that the life of Nazareth can be lived anywhere. With growing experience, the urgency to convert and baptize the Tuareg dwindles more and more to give way to God’s time. He sees himself as the one who prepares the way for preachers and missionaries in the future. This is done through teaching, gaining the confidence of, and developing friendships with the Tuareg he encounters.

His aim is to offer his life and dedicate to the Father as Jesus did freely on the cross “For the Glory of God and the salvation of mankind.” Charles aspired to a martyr’s death like his Beloved Jesus. The divine Spouse would grant his wish on December 1, 1916.

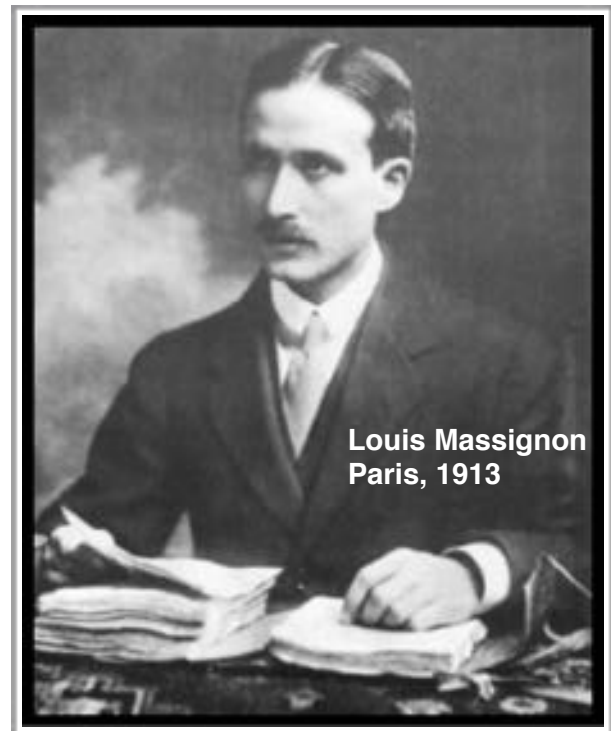
Reading Charles de Foucauld, Then And Now

Alain Blanchette

December 1, 1916. The First World War has been raging over Europe for two years. The astonishing technological development of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century contributed to a radical change in the weaponry and strategies of war. This new way of fighting in wars contributed to millions of deaths of soldiers and civilians. At its conclusion, it will have profoundly altered the geopolitics of Europe: empires crumbled, boundaries changed. In France, after decades of political instability following the revolution of 1789, the Republic came into power and embarked on an active policy of establishing the republican ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity ...and with a law adopted in 1905, secularism. It then set out to spread these values throughout its extensive colonial empire, convinced that this would civilize and free the millions of subjects from their ignorance. But this cannot be done easily. Furthermore, the war in Europe had repercussions in colonial Africa, creating turmoils and setting peoples against peoples. Algeria, the jewel of the colonial French empire was affected by this state of affairs. At sunset, on December 1916, rebellion struck at Tamanrasset, a small saharian village. Charles is the only person standing guard at the small fort that was built hastily by the colonial authorities. There is a knock at the door, probably a courier. Charles opens. He is cornered. He will die completely alone, shot in the head at age 58.

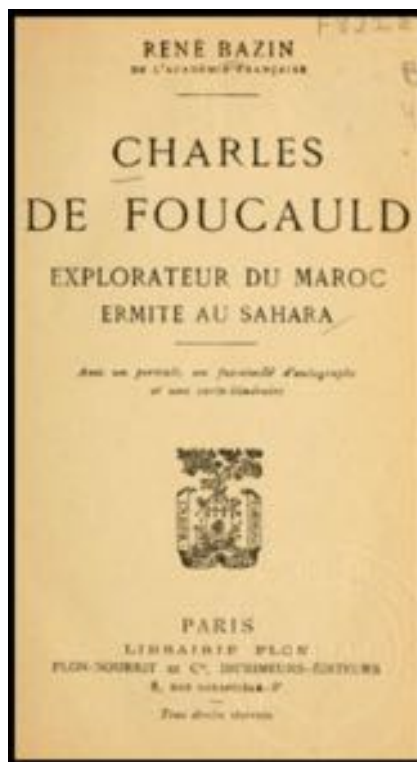
Were it not for the determination of his friend Louis Massignon, a renowned French expert in

Islam civilization, the life of Charles would have left few traces. But the persistence of Massignon and a few others yielded good results. René Bazin wrote the first biography of Charles de Foucauld in 1921. The revelation of Charles' life to the world had the effect of a tidal wave. In a few years, Charles' message touched the hearts of tens, hundreds, and eventually, thousands of people.



Foucauld wrote copiously during his prolific and relatively brief life. After his death, studies and writings on his life and writings surged in large numbers, in the hopes of spreading the knowledge and have his sainthood officially recognized. Charles' writings does not always hold the same degree of interest for us today. Outside of very specialized circles, who still reads his scientific works? Who amongst us will

take the time to read the innumerable repetitive texts of his meditations written in a heavy and romantic style? Who still consults the numerous life and community rules, almost maniacal in their precision, that he wrote in the hopes of creating an order for future disciples? None came forward in his lifetime, nor after. We must be wary of the fact, that in 2017, one should not attempt to read the works of Charles without a minimum of preparation and discipline. Like all of us, Foucauld belonged to a specific era and culture in time. His roots are aristocratic by birth and belong to the Second Empire. In a France where positivism (critical of theological knowledge) is triumphant, Foucauld questions his Catholic heritage at length. Product of a triumphant Church whose power is dwindling progressively, Charles explores with audacity and humility new avenues to communicate the evangelical message. Foucauld will become increasingly accessible to us only if we become familiar with his universe, consent to feel estranged and, possibly, accept to feel a certain annoyance. But if we agree to take the time and means to tame and discover his universe, Brother Charles will open his heart and soul. We will then discover a man whose heart is on fire, consumed in his soul by a fiery passion, a man whose vision is lost in the contemplation of his Beloved Brother and Lord, Jesus. In this way, Brother Charles reaches out to us because love knows no age. Even of different colors, love is here and elsewhere, yesterday and today.



I would be remiss if I did not conclude this brief text without insisting on the following. Like all true witnesses of the faith, Charles never sought notoriety. His total person reached out to Jesus and, in the footsteps of John the Baptist, he enjoyed living in simplicity, in the shadow of Jesus. Charles was a witness of Christ's person and, through Him and in Him, a way to the Source that is the Father. We must never forget this. In a world where Christian faith is no longer assumed and where we increasingly witness a total absence of religious culture

amongst our contemporaries, I deem it primordial to return to essential values and anchor once more the evangelizing mission of the Church on its most fundamental and solid bases. On the eve of the 100th anniversary of Charles' death, the noblest homage we can render him is to walk in his footsteps with humility, while focusing our gaze intensely towards Jesus.

“Presence of God, of Jesus, and imitation of Jesus (...) therein lies all perfection (...) It is as clear as daylight that he who acts like Jesus is perfect...Let us plunge with abandon in this divine

imitation (sweeter than honey for the loving heart, irrepressible need for the loving soul, a most imperial need the more ardent the love). Also let us contemplate the divine Beloved (it is neither less soft, nor less indispensable to love). He who loves loses himself and rests in contemplation of the loved Being.” (Beni Abbès, *Letter to a a Poor Clare of Nazareth*, May 13, 1903)

Charles de Foucauld: A Spiritual Guide

André Vidricaire

At the meeting of the Charles de Foucauld Lay Fraternities of North America held in June 2014, in Longueuil Quebec, I was astonished to hear the following words spoken by the speaker André Beauchamp: “Foucauld is a transcendent mystic, a man set ablaze by God like Elija, Isaac and Moses. He learned how to pray with the Trappists. He practiced a lengthy and slow meditation. Despite their highly emotional language, his spiritual writings seem to camouflage the dryness and aridity one experiences in prayer. Foucauld did not transmit a particular method of meditation and the branches of the Foucauld family I have known – the Jesus Caritas Fraternities of priests and the Lay Fraternities – seemed timid on the matter. I remember a couple who was invited by the Little Sisters of Jesus on the Anniversary of Charles de Foucauld. Without preparation, they were invited to meditate for an hour in silence. These people were horrified and never returned. Regardless of how we name it, meditation, mental prayer or contemplation, prayer without a supporting formula is always difficult.”

Since I do not totally share André Beauchamp’s opinion, I wish to demonstrate that, as Thérèse de Lisieux was proclaimed ‘Doctor of the Church’ in 1997, Charles de Foucauld should also be considered a ‘spiritual master’ of the mystery of Nazareth. In Nazareth, the Verb Incarnate adopted, with Mary and Joseph, a simple human existence. Jesus shared an ordinary, simple and layman-like way of life. In Nazareth, a small village of Galilea, neither Jesus, nor Joseph or Mary, exercised an apostolate task or a function in the Synagogue. On the contrary, the everyday life of Jesus and his family included manual work, housekeeping, travels to Jerusalem, observation of the Sabbath, Jewish feast days, and customs.

Considering Jesus’ life span that stretches over 30 years, in essence, a plain, repetitive, obscure and socially banal life, which contrasts with his sojourn in the desert after his baptism and his public life, one may ask, “What good can possibly stem from Nazareth?” (John 1,46) This question leads me to another. Compared to the rich traditions of the Church, the



contemplative life of monks and nuns, the apostolic life of the clergy and the various ministries that exists, what good emerged from Tamanrasset? The answer is FIRE!

Indeed, every phase of Charles de Foucauld's spiritual evolution occurred in a well known space-time-geographic sequence, first in Palestine, then Beni Abbès, and finally at Tamanrasset, where he lived the mystery of his Nazareth. As a result, the modest village of Tamanrasset became a sacred site like Nazareth, because the Word manifested itself and the Light shone. It is not easy to find one's way to incarnation nor to express daily and in concrete words such an offering of one's life. Charles faced this challenge during his itinerary and he resolved it step by step through an amorous and continuous effort to live in his flesh the most ordinary and daily living conditions of the Touaregs. He invited people from all walks of life: family, military, religious, scientists, ecclesiastics and friends, to care for the destiny of the Touaregs, while Charles himself remained in a state of "passive receptivity, and spontaneous greeting of Jesus" (Despraz), an absolute state of love, justice and truth.

In Tamanrasset, Charles de Foucauld pursued his constant scientific studies of the Tuareg language and poetry. He was in close daily contact with the people. He also wrote almost daily: (1) CORRESPONDANCE: for example, he wrote 342 letters in 1916; (2) NOTES ON SPIRITUALITY: reading of the Holy Gospel, retreats to strengthen the virtues of humility, poverty, prayer, etc., meditations etc.; (3) NOTE BOOKS: daily journal entries about people seen and visited, travels, expenses, liturgical calendar, etc. In Tamanrasset, Foucauld's Nazareth consisted of being and living every day in an intimate communion and a

continual conversation with Jesus and people around him. One must read Foucauld's MEDITATIONS, interlaced with prayers, which take the form of an amorous conversation and presence. Here is the sequence of his meditation:

A. Adore, praise, ask.

B. "What do **YOU** have to tell me?". **Listen**, discern, seize, learn from Jesus, meditate on his actions, gestures, thoughts and virtues; drink in the teachings of Jesus, understand him well to express the same sentiments and acts of Jesus.

C. "Here is what I have to tell you". **Talk**, have a conversation with Jesus.

D. In silence, look at length and passionately at Jesus, expressing your love with your eyes.

E. Observe yourself in your past, your future and the present in the context of the virtues (attitudes and activities) practiced by Jesus the Savior. Charles de Foucauld aims at imitating the very life of Jesus; this implies the establishment of a state of detachment, humility, poverty, abjection, penitence, with regards to food, clothing, furniture, residence, etc. Imitation of Jesus also requires a total availability of oneself because, "to give oneself, one must be completely free and available" (René Voillaume, *Au Coeur des masses*, Paris, Cerf, p.112). Also, self-sacrifice does not consist solely of exterior imitation, conformity, and resemblance, but in the sharing of sorrows and difficulties.

F. Resolutions

The imitation of Jesus during his life in Nazareth, as perceived by Charles' life style and writings, makes us realize that the most humble, prosaic and simple of human activities such as work, travel, domestic chores, social

obligations, etc., are perfectly compatible with a life led in the imitation of Jesus. The apparent simplicity of this form of plain daily life, without ministries, without preaching or teaching, without responsibilities in charitable works, is admiration, self-offering, and fire.

In this era of rampant secularization, the mystery of Nazareth appears to be a new way of relating with God and also with mankind, through mediation as practiced by Charles de Foucauld, a spiritual master for our ages.

A Journey Into Charles' Intimacy: A Few Key Readings

Yvonne Demers

Two significant persons are associated with the spiritual renewal of christian life at the turn of the XXth century : Sister Theresa of the Child Jesus and Charles de Foucauld; Theresa, by opening the "*the little way*" and Charles by the imitation of the *hidden life* of Jesus in Nazareth. Both invite us to *focus* on the person of Jesus and return to the Gospel, a Gospel lived in the crux of life, freed from all which could asphyxiate it.



Charles was a prolific writer, with abundant correspondence, notebooks and diaries, rules, meditations on the Scriptures, scientific research such as a geographic study of Morocco, a french-touareg dictionary and a compendium of touareg poetry. If we exclude his meditations on the Psalms and his commentaries on a few texts from the Old Testament, his spiritual works consist mainly of meditations on the Gospels written down during his stay at Nazareth and during his subsequent retreats in preparation of his ordination, or during his years in the Sahara.

Always return to the Gospel

In an article written in 2005 by Antoine Chatelard in *Sources Vives*, the *Journal of the Fraternities of Jerusalem* and reproduced in *Échanges of December 2009 (vol.2, no 12)*, the author states that the newly converted Charles had found in the Gospel the answer to the question that preoccupied him, and which haunted him all his life» : "What must I do? What is the will of Jesus for me today?" In a letter to Henri de Castrie (1) he wrote that "the Gospel taught him that the first commandment is to love God with all your heart and that one

must envelop everything in love.” He finds in Jesus the perfect and unique example of a man totally devoted to this commandment. Hence, his sole concern is the strict and rigorous imitation of Jesus, and for that reason, he resorts methodically and continually to the reading and meditation of the Holy Gospel. He writes the following to Joseph Hours: “Read the Holy Gospel again and again to have continually in mind the actions, the words and the thoughts of Jesus. In this way one can think, talk and act like Jesus and follow the examples and teachings of Jesus and not be distracted by the examples and the way of living of the world into which we succumb the minute our eyes turn away from the divine model”. (2)

Charles writes for himself

“Writing your meditations is a good meditation technique; it is particularly useful because it focuses our thoughts.” This is the advice his spiritual director, Father Huvelin, gives Charles in response to his confessing his difficulties to pray and the dryness of his spiritual life. In a letter to Father Jérôme during his stay at *the Poor Clares of Nazareth*, he writes: “I write every evening. You will see the difference between this way of meditating and any other : most often, written meditations are prayers and intimate conversations with the divine spouse of our souls. I tell him all I need to tell him (...) a very intimate encounter.” (3)

Charles never intended to publish his meditations and prayers. He never thought of himself as a preacher and a teacher, even less as the translator and interpreter of the Words of God. He was content with feeding himself from the Gospel to become a ‘living Gospel’. If he confided a few of his meditations to Father Jérôme, it was so that, as he writes to him “if ever in the future he needed them I could ask

you. I do not expect to have to do so but I prefer to be prudent because I have often destroyed similar meditations, only to regret that gesture because I later realized how they would have been useful”. (4)

When one reads Charles’ spiritual writings, it is essential to realize that we enter into his intimate universe. We become witnesses of the heart to heart rapport Charles is experiencing with the one he loves with passion, and whose teachings he listens to. We are witnesses of this profound and unique communion between God and Charles kneeling at his feet.

Here I am and I love you (5)

The following section is largely based on Patrick Mahoney’s notes and musings that he shared while attending a group established by André Vidricaire, where each member would share their thoughts on Charles’ texts on a regular basis.

Charles’ writings are foremost expressions of love. His life and his thoughts take shape and structure around two major poles: an acute conscience of the loving presence of God and, in response, a passionately amorous adoration of this loving God. This transpires evidently in his style of writing. An amorous intensity dominates but at times it can be disconcerting. Many readers will experience a certain lassitude when faced with such a strong romantic style and expression which sometimes resembles a repetitive litany. In his introduction to his compilation of meditations, *Crier l’Évangile* (p 15-16), Maurice Bouvier warns the reader: “The spiritual writings of Charles are not to be read superficially, thinking that they are very often repetitive, even tainted by a boring facility of the writer’s pen, and an exaggerated amorous fantasy; everything Charles draws, writes and

composes flows from a man who is rigorous and methodical, a man of science who masters his subject and the required logic.”

Charles knows no compromise. His emotional intensity permeates his texts openly, contrary to other spiritual authors who, for didactic and strategic reasons, will adjust and temper their texts to please the reader.

Louis Massignon, whose life bore some similarities to Charles’ (delinquent youth, conversion at a later age, contact with Islam, man of science...), was a precious confidant of Charles, especially in spiritual matters. In a letter dated May 1, 1912, he writes : “We must set our eyes on God, his beauty, his infinite love which deigns love us...when we love we contemplate whom we love...when we love we forget ourselves and think of whom we love... It is not love when we think incessantly that we are unworthy of love...he who loves can only think of whom he loves.” This quote introduces another dimension of Charles’ love, a dimension which stems from his love of God and strengthens it : the love of others, mainly our close neighbor. “To attain the love of God, practice the love of mankind : in all human beings see a child of God, a brother or sister of Jesus, for whom he died, a soul to be saved... There is no better way to God’s love than charity towards his children because of Him.” (*Letter sent by Charles to Louis Massignon*, January 12, 1916.)

Repeat to imitate Jesus and love with greater intensity

Charles observed with joy that Jesus reiterates his love continually and reminds us that “God repeated a thousand times that he would answer our prayers every time we would ask with humility and faith”. (*La Bonté de Dieu*, p.

115). Charles expresses his gratitude : “How good You are to repeat patiently and in a hundred ways the same fundamental teachings.” (*L’imitation du Bien-Aimé*, p.224).

Since for Charles “imitation is the measure of love”, it follows that he must use repetition: repeat what he hears as a lesson from Jesus in his meditations, repeat endlessly his declaration of love, “telling Jesus he loves him and adores him and belongs to him, and feeling him answer to repeat this and tell it to him endlessly.” (*La dernière place*, p.268)



We also observe the repetitive character of his writings. Contrary to other writers, we do not perceive a linear development in his text. He does not develop a thesis. We observe a circular development of his ideas and prayer as if they spiraled more deeply and intensely in the contemplation of God in the full expression of the love that unites them.

In small doses

Charles advised his friend Louis Massignon to read the Gospel continually and with assiduity, but in small doses: “ Make the effort of finding time to read 10-15-20 (no more than half a chapter) lines from the Gospel every day. With time you will have read the whole Gospel. After

each reading, meditate for a few minutes mentally or by writing on the teachings of the text. We must impregnate ourselves with the spirit of Jesus through a ceaseless reading and repeated reading, a ceaseless meditating and repeated meditating on the words and examples set by Jesus : may they fill our souls like a water drop that falls endlessly on a pavement, always on the same spot.” (6).

One should approach reading Charles’ texts the way he counsels his friend to read the Gospel: no more than 10 pages at a time or no more than a complete meditation session. This is the advice of Patrick Mahoney. He also counsels to choose a time of day where our mind is at rest : “If one reads Charles while emotionally preoccupied, distracted or tired, we risk being overwhelmed and not able to support the intense emotional energy that emerges.” Mahoney uses the analogy of ‘sensorial adaptation’ to warn the reader of the risks of a too intense exposure to Charles’ radicalism and his emotional exaggerations. He recommends a gradual entry in Charles’ way of thinking, feeling, saying and writing.

Conclusion

We, who are deeply attached to Charles, a witness who, like Thérèse de Lisieux, was influential and marked a turning point in the history of Christian spiritual development, we, who want to walk in his footsteps and make of our lives a ‘Living Gospel’, we are invited to bypass what may be too challenging in Charles, and risk intruding into his intimacy. We read Charles’ works, through him, by identifying with him; immersing ourselves into his spirit and his heart, to better seize the intensity of his love and to better share it with others.

- (1) Letter, August 14, 1901
- (2) Letter, May 3, 1912
- (3) Letter to my Trappist brothers, February 15, 1898
- (4) Letter, February 15, 1898
- (5) Words Charles attributes to Jesus in a meditation on Luke, 8,24, *Crier l’Évangile (Cry the Gospel)*, Nouvelle Cité, 2004, p.89.
- (6) Letter dated July 22, 1914, in Jean-François Six, *L’Aventure de l’Amour de Dieu*, Seuil, Paris, 1993, p.166

John 4, 9

The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”

Imagine the scene: a desert, a hot sun, a well, Jesus sitting alone, a woman arrives, an unexpected conversation.

Is this meeting ordinary? Why?
Where does Jesus wait for me?
When and where can I meet Jesus?
Have I ever experienced an unusual encounter?



Drawing by Manon
Sichem Fraternity, 1990

Priscilla and Aquila, A Modern Couple

Nadine Taylor

In his general audience of February 7, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI made a presentation on the virtues of a couple of spouses who lived at the very beginning of Christendom. Priscilla and Aquila, who worked alongside the apostle Paul in the early flourishing Church, are described as " (a) couple (who) demonstrates how important the action of Christian spouses is. (...) The daily sharing of their life prolongs and in some way is sublimated in the assuming of a common responsibility in favour of the Mystical Body of Christ, even if just a little part of it." In his letter to Joseph Hours dated May 3, 1912, Charles de Foucauld abounds on the importance of this couple in the mission of evangelization, "It is certain that besides priests, Priscilla and Aquila are needed, seeing those that the priest does not see, penetrating where he cannot penetrate, going to those who flee from him, evangelizing through a beneficent contact, a kindness overflowing over all ... " (translated from the French).

Who is this couple that we can look at as a model of Christian life in this modern world? Who are Priscilla and Aquila whom Paul presented as friends and companions in the mission of evangelization?

As Paul traveled and preached in the early communities of the Church, he was invariably aided in his path by people who heard the call of God. It is during this period of the early Church that we find people who have acted as builders of the Church, fellow workers and road mates such as Silas, Timothy and Luke.

While many individuals are named throughout Paul's stories, Priscilla and Aquila stand out as his companions in the work of Jesus Christ, and moreover, a married couple (Rom 16: 3). They are of Jewish origin and were expelled from Rome after the Edict of Emperor Claudius in the year 49. They fled Rome for Corinth where they meet Paul, presumably during his second missionary journey in the year 51. They welcomed Paul in their home and worked together as tent makers (Acts 18: 1-3). It was also in their home that they welcomed the first assemblies of the Church at a time when places of worship were still non-existent (1 Cor 16:19). Like Gaius, like Nymphas, Archippus, they welcomed the believers to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist. (Rm 16, 23: Col 4, 15: Phm 1, 2)

They also traveled with Paul on his third missionary journey, as they ventured to Syria and then to Ephesus (Acts 18:18). Paul left his companions to pursue his way to Jerusalem,

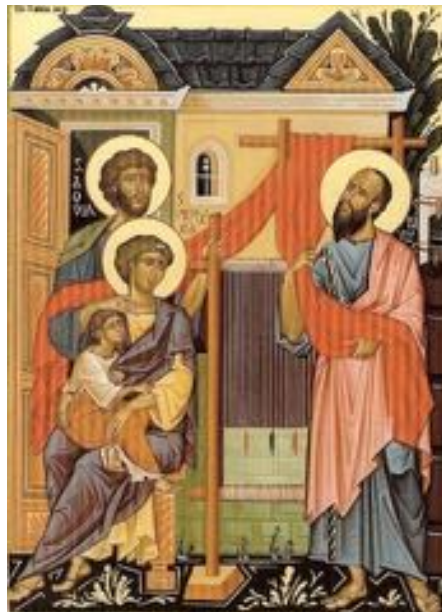


Antioch, Galatia and Phrygia. Meanwhile, Priscilla and Aquila, again at Ephesus, heard a preacher named Appollos. He was educated and proclaimed the Word, but since he had only a knowledge of John's baptism, the couple took him aside to continue his education in the Truth (Acts 18:26).



In his presentation to the International Ecumenical Colloquium held in Switzerland in March 2016, on the theme 'Family in a Community: The Future of a Utopia' (1), François Lestang exposes the importance of Priscilla and Aquila in Paul's life. While throughout the Gospels, men are named first, followed by their wife's name, when it is stated, the case of Priscilla and Aquila stands out even more. When Paul greets his hosts, such as Nymphas or Archippus, he thanks them for their welcome in their house, "to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in **your** house." (Phil 1: 2) . Man has the privileged place as host of these assemblies. In thanking Priscilla and Aquila for having welcomed them, he said: "Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in **their** house." (1 Cor 16:19) Or, "Greet also the church that meets at **their** house." (Rom 16: 5) The couple is named together equally. At the beginning of their meeting in Corinth, Aquila was named first, but later, at the meeting described in the letter to the Romans, Priscilla has been given the first place.

Paul refers to the couple as "my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus" (Rom 16: 3). François Lestang mentions that the Greek term 'sunergos', which he translates as 'co-operative', is used by Paul to refer to his fellow workers in evangelization, like Timothy (1 Th 3: 2; 2 Cor 1:24, Rom 16, 21), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), Aristarchus (Col 4:11, Phm 24), Urban (Rom 16: 9) and many others. Only Priscilla, a woman, is so designated with her husband. In his homily on Priscilla and Aquila, St. John Chrysostom (344-407) conveys a greater devotion to the



wife than to her husband, and it is fitting that she is the one who makes the instruction of Apollos, and not the couple. (2) Some theologians have even come to believe that Priscilla may have been the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, a theory which places even more emphasis on the importance of this woman's knowledge and on the strength of the couple. (3)

In the words of Benedict XVI, in his speech, "we honour Aquila and Priscilla as models of conjugal life responsibly committed to the service of the entire Christian community. And we find in them the model of the Church, God's family for all times."

(1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvzUOGVz--M>

(2) <http://www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/priscilla-papers/john-chrysostom's-first-homily-greeting-priscilla-and-aquila>

(3) Hoppin, Ruth. *Priscilla's Letter: Finding the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Lost Coast Press, 2009

But de la revue

Chercher et aider à vivre pour ce temps-ci l'Évangile de Jésus-Christ.

Objectifs

Approfondir la vie, les écrits et la spiritualité de Charles de Foucauld.

Permettre aux personnes et aux groupes qui s'inspirent de Charles de Foucauld de témoigner de leur histoire et de leur vécu.

Accueillir d'autres expériences spirituelles et identifier les liens avec la spiritualité de Charles de Foucauld.

Actualiser la spiritualité de Charles de Foucauld pour qu'elle éclaire les enjeux et les problématiques d'aujourd'hui.

Translation:
Gilles Robineault

Revision:
Gilles Robineault
Nadine Taylor

Layout:
Nadine Taylor

Comité d'orientation de la revue Échanges: Carl Corbeil, Gilles Dugal, p.s. Myriam Van Male, Ciro Piccirillo, Louise-Marie Lemire, Céline Martin, Françoise Deroy-Pineau, Gaston Pineau, François Baril, Yvonne Demers, Nadine Taylor. Il se réunit une fois l'an pour réagir à l'action du comité de coordination, suggérer des thèmes et des noms d'auteurs potentiels pour les numéros à venir, donner leur avis sur le financement, la promotion et les stratégies de développement de la revue.

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