

considerable difference in attitude between these earlier English writers and that of the Spanish Mystics. In the latter part of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* the Doctor of Mystical Theology seems almost to adopt a critical and antipathetic spirit to ecclesiastical ceremonial. In the England of the 14th century the country was already flooded with devotional literature like the *Layfolks' Mass Book*, and *Prymers*, and Guides to Curates; and these writers seem on the whole to presuppose this. Not so William Langland; he is delineating the beginning and growth of the spiritual life in the common man, and so he needs to presuppose nothing. He forms a bridge between the common prayer-book literature and the mystical literature of the time.

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CHARLES DE FOUCAULD:  
THIRTY YEARS AFTERWARDS

BY

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CHARLES DE FOUCAULD'S silent death at Tamanrasset on December 1st, 1916, was the crowning proof, in a life full of them, of the falsity of that remark of an Arab's to Ernest Psichari: '*Oui, vous autres français, vous avez le royaume de la terre; nous, les Maures, nous avons le royaume du ciel.*' The kingdom of heaven was surely opened to this Frenchman who had lived prepared for such a death; for in one of his notebooks, found after his death, was discovered this sentence, written at the head of the page: *Vivre comme si tu devais mourir martyr aujourd'hui.*

His life is too well known for it to be recounted once again; but it is useful for many reasons to attempt an estimate of the influence of that life, and to try and fathom to some degree Père Charles's intentions and motives, to seek, even, an interpretation of that living martyrdom that was his life.

He died to all outward seeming a failure; yet how often is that the lot of the saints. His diaries, his letters, all record his great desire for some companions to share his solitude. Not that he did not desire a solitary life, but that he would people the Sahara with solitaries, preaching the Gospel by prayer, by penance, by example, by charity.

They never came. Père Charles de Foucauld died alone except for his enemies. But they are in the Sahara, now, his solitaries. He did not die in vain.

Of all Charles de Foucauld's writings—considerable in quantity: they have lately been typed ready to send to Rome in view of the promotion of his Cause, and number 15,925 quarto sheets—two small books will yield a fruitful harvest to the reflective reader who will study them in search of their author: they are his *Évangile présenté aux pauvres du Sahara* and his *Directoire*.

It was his constant conviction that with the poor sons of Islam it was hardly possible to start right away presenting them with the great Christian dogmas. They must be prepared by charity and prayer. This, to the best of his ability, he did. He wrote also that when the time came he, or more likely his successors, should be ready for the work that there would be to do—the reaping and garnering of the great harvest that was waiting. He understood that future audience and their ways of thought: the apostolate must be adapted to them. When a voice, not his perhaps, should be uplifted in the desert, it must not cry in vain.

He knew with what he had to contend. How often had he heard the boast that is also the *Credo* of the Mahometan. His answer had no need of boasting, but it was clear and to the point: 'The last of the prophets was our Lord, Jesus, whom God had promised to Adam . . . between Adam and Jesus were many prophets, the chief of whom were Noë, Abraham, Isaac . . . Malachias, John the Baptist. Since our Lord there has not been, there will not be any until the end of the world, for God has taught us by the mouth of our Lord that . . . our religion will remain until the last judgment, without any change'. God is always God, but Mahomet is no longer his prophet. And Père Charles proceeds, with little commentary, with no paraphrase, to heap up quotations from the prophets and prophecies concerning our Lord: Isaac, David, down to Jeremias and Michas. If he wrote for the future, his mission was then no less clear to him: 'One must not try to make conversions for a long time, but to seek to love, to cherish, to enter into close contact with the natives . . . if this is done, at the end of a variable time . . . twenty-five, fifty, a hundred years, conversions will come of themselves in the same way that fruit ripens on the tree, and in proportion as the general education of the natives increases'. But he saw well that if the Mahometans of the desert never saw a priest, never came in contact with Christians, save with men who were Christian in name alone and sought merely to exploit them, giving an example not of virtue but of vice, the way of their conversion would be blocked and they would come to hate our holy religion.

Here lies the explanation of his poor and solitary life. Here can be seen, too, another characteristic that occurs so constantly in his life—before his conversion as after it. He did nothing by halves. As a young officer he set out to enjoy himself: so well did he do so that he was sent away from his regiment on account of the scandal he was causing. He decides later to explore Morocco. He carries through his expedition in the face of well-nigh insuperable difficulties and untold hardships. He is converted, and again there are no half measures. He must live the Gospel to the letter. He tries his vocation with the Cistercians, and leaves them after seven years because the life is not hard enough nor poor enough. He goes to Nazareth in search of that same poverty, and

finds it eventually in the Sahara as priest and solitary, taking there Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and suffering and praying for the forgotten and abandoned Touaregs. This peaceful penetration into the desert was surely a pattern for missionary work nearer home. *Mutatis mutandis* of course, for the white habit, the almost Arab costume, the manner of life, were meant for a certain locality only. But the method in its essence is as applicable to the English countryside as it was to the Touareg population in the Sahara in the first decades of this century.

If Père de Foucauld died alone leaving no one to follow him, the Sahara is, for all that, not now without its solitaries who carry on his tradition. On 8th September, 1933, the late Cardinal Verdier gave the white habit and scapular sewn with the heart surmounted by a cross to the first five brothers of the Sacred Heart (*Les Petits Frères du Sacré Coeur*). Their first hermitage is established at El-Abiodh in the Sud-Oranais in Algeria, and in 1934 their church was completed. Their life is fashioned on Père de Foucauld's ideal, but in some respects they have developed the points of the rule he left.

Readers of his life will remember the great part exposition of the Blessed Sacrament played in his devotional life. This tradition is continued at El-Abiodh. On the other hand it is impossible not to be struck, in the different rules that Père de Foucauld drew up for these followers that never came, at the almost complete lack of emphasis on the liturgical side of worship. The Divine Office seems almost neglected. Yet the Divine Office is part of the official worship of God by the Church. To insist on exposition, which after all is not a normal part of the Church's worship, to the detriment of what is a regular, integral part, gives, to say the least, a lop-sided effect. Yet one can understand how it came about in de Foucauld's case. He was converted and made his first steps in his renewed Christian life under the influence of a holy French secular priest (the Abbé Huvelin); he followed the life of a Parisian parish church where, save for his low Mass of a week-day, a possible high Mass of a Sunday, regular liturgical life as it is practised nowadays only, unfortunately, in the older religious orders of the Church, was a thing unknown. It has been said, moreover, that one of his reasons for leaving the Cistercians was that too much time was given to Psalmody and not enough to private prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. However this may be it is certain that in his first project of a *Rule* (1896: before he was a priest therefore), seven and a half hours daily were to be consecrated to prayer, but there was to be no Office (*nous ne pouvons pas songer à réciter le saint Office*). In its place, mental prayer, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, two (entire) Rosaries a day.

His second project (1901) goes indeed a step further. He will have priests in the congregation, they will be bound to the

Breviary. There will be no choir, but the priests will recite the greater part of their Hours before the Blessed Sacrament exposed. The third (and last) scheme (1911), the project of missionary monks mentions the Divine Office *recited* in common, but with no choral obligation—one wonders how this would have worked out in practice; the Office is never to be sung. Apparently the fraternity at El-Abiodh has modified this somewhat; they say Office chorally, they sing Mass, Vespers and Compline daily.

The special mission of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart is to promote the reign of Jesus and of charity, in their own hearts and the hearts of others. They will live only in missionary countries, and try to adapt themselves as to language and conditions of life to the place of their residence. Thus their chapel and whole hermitage is built in the style of their country. All the public prayers of the community, save what are of obligation in Latin, are said in Arabic. And so on. The Brothers have their counterpart in the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, founded some ten years ago; they have two establishments in France, and one in the Sahara at El-Golea, where is the tomb of Fr Charles de Foucauld.

There are other solitaries in the Sahara. The French Cistercians have made a foundation near Lodi in the Atlas (*Notre-Dame de l'Atlas*) and English readers will lately have been able to read the account given by Madame Raissa Maritain (*Adventures in Grace*, page 178 seq.) of Père Charles Henrion and his hermit life. But no account of this modern exodus to the Sahara and to Morocco would be complete without a word on a young Franciscan who died there as lately as 1938. Père de Foucauld, before his conversion and in disguise, made a journey of exploration in Morocco. In those days there was no priest there at all, and when he was later living in the Sahara he wrote of the spiritual destitution of that country. It is worthwhile mentioning, therefore, that in 1939 there were 74 priests (the majority of them Franciscans) and 110,000 Catholics—French colonials for the most part—in French Morocco.

Père Charles André Poissonnier O.F.M. died at Tazert, Morocco, in 1938. He had gone there alone to work among the people under the inspiration of the example of Père de Foucauld and his work among the Touaregs. André Poissonnier was a native of Roubaix in the extreme north of France; he was born on October 30, 1897, the sixth of eight children in a truly Christian family. After he had finished his schooling at the Institution Notre-Dame des Victoires in his home town, he made, with his school-fellows, an end-of-year retreat. Père de Foucauld was adduced as an example in the course of the conferences, and this incidental reference determined the whole course of his life. After his military service he went out to Morocco as a settler to Oulad-Chleuh, north-east of Rabat, but there was no happiness for him in this sort of life and he was soon in touch with the Franciscans at Rabat. He entered their novitiate

at Amiens and was solemnly professed in 1927 and ordained priest the following year. While he was a theological student at Mons-en-Baroeul he followed a medical course for a term or two at Lille University. A further year of study after his ordination, and he was ready to set out, under obedience, for Morocco. He embarked at Marseilles in November, 1929.

Two notes, written at this time, are relevant here. 'It is essential to join prayer to action', he writes; 'I must endeavour, as far as possible, to obtain two hours of mental prayer daily: one in the morning, a half-hour in the evening, and half-an-hour at night, as during the past six years'. In a letter he wrote to his mother he sent a picture of Père de Foucauld and remarked: 'He it is who decided my life. This picture will remind you of my ideal and that my dearest wish is to pray and get prayers for the conversion of the Mahometans. I have offered my life for them'. He was sent eventually to Tazert. Charles de Foucauld had passed near there on his journey of exploration in 1883. A hermitage, a small chapel, a dispensary: Père Charles-André Poissonnier (he had added the name Charles at his profession—one can readily divine why) was ready to begin work among the Berbers.

He began then a work in almost all respects like to that of Père de Foucauld among the Touaregs. He must not yet preach the Gospel; he could show it though through his life. Charity, the very giving of self in the service of one's neighbour, is the essential of the apostolate at all times—the spreading of the charity of Christ.

He healed their wounds, acted as dentist on occasion, prescribed for their sickness. His clientèle rapidly mounted, and showed at the end of the first year upwards of 10,000 separate consultations. 'It is sometimes hard', he wrote at this time; 'one must have a patience that I am far from possessing. One must be smiling, affable, even after long hours at work, when all is by no means rosy and agreeable'. To help those who could not come to him, he took to making long journeys on muleback.

His daily life was crowded, for up very early in the morning, after mental prayer and Mass, he would set out on his rounds. On arrival home, late at night perhaps, he had to prepare his simple meal, then he must say his Office, make his mental prayer and so to bed. In spite of such crowded tiring days he did not abandon his old habit of getting up during the night to pray. In 1937 famine caused by drought added to his labours, for now he distributed to the starving population what grain he could obtain; soon typhus, as was to be expected, followed in the wake of famine. 'The duty of my vocation obliges me to have direct and close contact with the natives', he writes. 'I accept willingly dangers which do not frighten me in the least. On the contrary, for I am staying here for the love of God. If I catch the disease . . . it will be the most fitting end for a priest'.

On February 5, 1938, the expected happened. Père Poissonnier

was taken off to Marrakech where, despite all possible attention, he died on February 18. 'I came here to make known the charity of Christ through that of his representative', he had written. In dying at his labours, and through them, his highest desire was fulfilled.

Père de Foucauld's method of apostolate is becoming increasingly better known and understood in France. The fraternity at El-Abdioldh has twenty-five postulants waiting to join, and Père Poissonnier's work at Tazert is being continued by Père Abel Fauc O.F.M. Others, too, are seeking the desert. This movement to the Sahara (will it one day rival the exodus to the desert of early Christianity?) takes, naturally, Père de Foucauld for its inspiration. In the Directory that he wrote for the Association of Prayer for the Conversion of the Heathen<sup>1</sup> he lays down so well the aims and method of this apostolate.

'Remembering that our Lord Jesus has said: "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor thy neighbours who are rich; lest they also invite thee again, and a recompense be made to thee. But when thou makest a feast call the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. And thou shalt be blessed, because they have not wherewith to make thee recompense: for recompense shall be made thee at the resurrection of the just", we shall then direct our efforts towards the conversion of those who are spiritually the poorest, the most crippled, the most blind, the infidel peoples of missionary countries; those who know not the Good News; who have no tabernacle, nor Sacrifice, nor Priest; the most abandoned souls, those who are most sick, the sheep that are indeed lost'. We can pray too that the author of these words may soon be proposed officially as a model for such work and invoked publicly in the Church. His Cause has been introduced; may its conclusion not long tarry.

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## IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

*A translation of part of St Thomas's commentary  
on the Gospel of St John*

BY

A. D.

To understand this term 'word' we should note that, as Aristotle teaches, vocal sounds are signs of movements within the soul. In Scripture, of course, it is usual for things signified to be called by the names of the signs, as in 1 *Cor.* 11: 'But the rock was Christ'. But it is necessary that what is within our soul and expressed by our spoken word, should itself be called word. Whether the term 'word' belongs first to what is uttered by the voice, or to the concept within the soul, is not immediately relevant. It is none the

<sup>1</sup> Now the *Association Charles de Foucauld*, 5 rue Monsieur, Paris VIIe.