

CHARLES DE FOUCAULD

(born 1858 - Strasburg, France – died 1916 Tamanrasset, Algeria) Charles de Foucauld was born in a wealthy family in France, in his youth he joined the army and led a comfortable luxurious and sinful life. When he was about thirty years old he became a believer, changed his life, and felt the call to a contemplative and missionary life. This call has been prophetic for our times.

Brother Charles was the first to emphasize the hidden ordinary life of Jesus at Nazareth, was attracted by a call to imitate Jesus in that particular life-style by choosing the “last place” in a radical way. His life is a call especially to lay people who are always challenged to witness the gospel in ordinary life and a powerful summons to understand the radical demand of the gospel to live out a simple life-style open to the encounter and committed to meet the needs of others, especially the underprivileged

A number of communities and associations were inspired by Charles de Foucauld. Even if he did not start a religious community himself, he prayed all his life, dreamt about and wrote rules for a community of brothers both contemplatives and missionaries at the same time.

We, as a Contemplative Missionary Movement did not begin from his spirituality, indeed we realised that we were in line with it when we read his writings and became acquainted with other communities inspired by him.

Following are some prophetic messages we find in Charles de Foucauld’s life, which are present in our life too.

Monk and Missionary

For several centuries in the history of the Church the two calls, to a missionary and contemplative life, seemed to be in opposition. In the life of Brother Charles the two aspects were united and reconciled in a wonderful way.

The Eucharist was his “all”: his greatest attraction was to immerse himself in the love of Jesus and spend time in front of the Eucharist without measure.

At the same time his heart was full of mercy and compassion for each individual, his cloister was a space open to all.

Brother Charles was not content with sharing the little he had (food, medicines...): the need of his heart was to radiate the gospel with his very life and be a sign of the presence of Jesus through his kindness and his friendship, and be a real brother with his heart open to every human being.

A New Way of Contemplative Life

To Brother Charles prayer means to drink at the source of the gospel in order to acquire the mind that was of Jesus on every aspect of life, on God himself, on human-kind as well.

Charles de Foucauld became a true monk, a contemplative missionary immersed in his mission through the many hours spent in adoration of the Eucharist and in meditation of the gospel.

A New Way of Missionary Life

It is Jesus’ life-style: incarnation, respect, sharing, being one with people, in their poverty, language, their ways of thinking, in order to understand and recognize that the Gospel is already present among them.

To a friend, a medical doctor who asked him: “What would you suggest me to do in order to help the Tuareg?”, Charles answered: “You must be open, kind and good towards them, love them and be lovable. Be kind and smile even when you say ordinary things. As you see, I always smile. A smile brings people closer, gives them the opportunity to understand each other better. A smile is true love”.