

## Charles De Foucauld's Vocational Journey and Religious Formation

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### Abstract

Charles de Foucauld has religiously inspired the local people in Africa through his exemplary living, by imbibing their values, by enculturating and africanising throughout his stay. Gomes argues that the modern context of the priests and religious also calls for the same mission-mindedness. Apostolic vision, active contemplation, and exemplary evangelisation by being witnesses is the call of the hour for the formees in the seminaries today.

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**Keywords:** Foucauld, Religious formation, Apostolic, Christianity, Touaregs

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### Introduction

Spiritual life is the sum total of responses which one makes to what is perceived as the inner call of God. It is not locked up inside a person, but rather it is a growing, coherent set of responses integrated into the complex behaviour patterns of human life in search for a meaning. When the individual decides to respond to the call of God experienced within, and strives to make this call the centre of activity and choice, he or she may be truly called a spiritual person. The call then becomes the integrating factor for the person who responds. We are able to verify in the life of Brother Charles, that spiritual life is indeed the work of a lifetime. In the case of Brother Charles he was authentically motivated with a single-minded sense of purpose to realise the ideal of his vocation. Such single-minded commitment, unfortunately is missing from many. Today, the important task of formation has become very difficult. In responding to God's call the candidates often seem distracted and have conflicting goals. They seem to lack a sense of purpose and single-mindedness to follow Christ.

### Apostolic dimension of Brother Charles' Vocation

Brother Charles felt deeply in him a passionate desire for reproducing in the reality of his day to day living the same life of the Word of God made man in all its expressions, especially that of the 'hidden life' of abnegation, last place, in a word His 'kenosis'. This 'will' to live the 'hidden life' of Jesus at Nazareth was the first thread of thought that guided his life ever since his conversion. The long hours spent in prayerful contemplation in front of the Blessed Sacrament ignited in him a strong desire to imitate Jesus, his Master, and thus be a *saviour* with Him in order to save souls.

For Charles, priesthood implied a gift of himself to the poor. This desire to save souls and work for their salvation would become the *affair of his life*.<sup>1</sup> To be a 'saviour' with Jesus imitating His 'hidden life' at Nazareth was to become inseparable for Charles. In his meditations at Nazareth on the 'hidden life' of Christ, he recognised the apostolic dimension of his vocation as a preaching on the Gospel through life and example. Through the imitation of the 'hidden life' of Jesus, Brother Charles was called to make a total gift of himself to others in love. For it is precisely in becoming a 'gift' to others that one transcends himself more fully.<sup>2</sup>

Two extremes had long taken possession of him: an absolute love for God, and a total dedication to the people who were furthest from God. These two poles of his spiritual life would meet in a single love which would send him out, spur him onward, and finally lead him to give the greatest proof of love possible: to lay down his life for his friends. In the imitation of Jesus, the constant denominator of the spiritual evolution of Charles' life, we find in him a new way of living the contemplative religious life. The originality of his religious life consisted in living in the world, among the people, with an apostolate of presence and friendship.<sup>3</sup>

### **Characteristic features of his Apostolate**

Priestly ordination at the age of forty-two, in 1901 was for Brother Charles a turning point in his life. Before, he had put all his energies into his intimate personal relationship with Jesus, his Beloved Brother. Now he thought in terms of *being Jesus for others* in order to join Jesus in his immolation for the salvation of all, and in particular to offer the divine feast to the poor. This does not in any way lessen his love for Jesus, but rather there is a deepening in his relationship with His Beloved. While continuing to look at Jesus and love Him, Charles feels called to enter more deeply into the logic of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Human brotherhood and God's Fatherhood find, for Charles, their centre in Jesus. We shall now present very systematically the original and dominant features of his spirituality of action as a missionary-monk in the heart of the Sahara.

### **Contemplative in Action**

Even though it appears very clearly that Brother Charles' interior life was centred on the Nazareth mystery, we cannot, however, define his spirituality as 'Nazarene' spirituality. In the concrete existence of his day to day living in the Saharan mission, he was a contemplative in action, as R. Voillaume remarks (Voillaume, 105):

1 J.F. Six(ed.), *L'aventure del' amour de Dieu - 80 lettres inedites de Charles de Foucauld aa Louis Massignon*, Paris, Seuil, 1993.

2 *Gaudium et Spes*, The Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church in the Modem World, 7 December 1965, in AAS 58 (1966) pp. 1025-1120.

3 Cf. Voillaume, *Les Fratemites du Pere de Foucauld*, p. 81.

His was a contemplative spirituality very much centred on the Eucharist and the Sacred-Heart..... It was totally oriented towards contacts with people, with their needs, with their sufferings. His spirituality in no way lessened these contacts, but on the contrary, served as nourishment and a new vigour in trying to bring all these souls to Christ, his first source. The spirituality of Father de Foucauld is entirely Christ-centred. Even though his life was apparently very exterior, Jesus always remained the source and the goal of his activities; this was the Little Brother as he gave himself to the people who surrounded him...<sup>4</sup>

While remaining fundamentally a contemplative, he felt an urge to be a 'saviour' with Jesus through a fraternal and friendly service of love to the poor and the needy of the Hoggar in total availability. He renewed and nourished his contemplative life each day at the very source of the mystery of Christ, the Saviour. In spite of upsetting the classical conception of monastic life and bringing about this novelty, Charles did not sacrifice its essential values in his being a contemplative in the world.

Writing on the reality in which he found himself in the Saharan mission, Brother Charles confides to Fr. Huvelin (LAH, 204):

My life follows the same routine always. Exteriorly, I am very much occupied but I am peaceful. It's the same thing everyday, poor people sick people, and one after the other. I reproach myself interiorly for not spending enough time in prayer and purely spiritual things. By day people never stop knocking at my door, and at night when it would be good time for it I fall asleep like a wretch. It shames me and saddens me that sleep takes up more room than I want it to.....<sup>5</sup>

### **Inculturation: a Toureg among Touregs**

During his sojourn in the Holy Land, Charles soaked himself in the spirit of Jesus by reading and rereading, meditating and re-meditating the words and examples of Jesus. In making a choice to go to Africa among the neediest, he let himself be moulded and guided by the logic of the Incarnation mystery of Christ. This fascination for the person of Jesus made flesh, led him to make this fundamental option to go (*Seul avec Dieu*, 80):

...there where Jesus would go: 'to the most lost sheep', to the 'brother' of Jesus 'to the most sick', to the most abandoned, to those who have very few shepherds, to those who 'are in total thick darkness', in the shadow of death that is most 'profound', to the most 'capture' by the devil, to the most 'blind', to the most 'lost',

4 Cf. Voillaume, *Les Fraternités du Père de Foucauld*, p. 105.

5 J.F. Six, (ed.), *Père de Foucauld - Abbé Huvelin: Correspondence inédite*, Tournai, Desclée de Brouwer, 1957, p. 204.

First, to the unbelievers (Muslims and Pagans) of Morocco and the regions of North Africa...<sup>6</sup>

Sharing the lot of the poor and the emarginated was for Brother Charles part and parcel of his vocation and at the same time a demand and proof of his love for Jesus. In this he was certainly ahead of his time, in spite of the religious, social and political difficulties. Incarnation mystery showed him how to adapt himself in the context by following the example of Jesus and becoming all things to all men with the unique desire in his heart, that of giving Jesus to all. He had understood very well the lesson of this great mystery. In one of his meditations, he makes Jesus speak about the significance of this great mystery:

Incarnation - He, God, Creator, came to live in this world as a creature. You see the devotion to humanity, and measure how much it should be yours... You see this humility for the good of humanity, and learn to humble yourself to do good, to go first of all to souls as I went first to souls... to make yourself small to win others, not to fear to descend, to lose your rights while doing things for the good of others, not to believe anymore in anything except in descending to make oneself powerless to do good. On the contrary, in descending one imitates, in descending one engages oneself to save souls, the means that I myself made use of...<sup>7</sup>

For Brother Charles this inculturation or 'africanisation' was not simple or easy as he had to strip himself of his French colonial mentality, the type of aristocratic and religious education that he received, his language and culture and insert himself into the poor indigenous context and assume their mentality, customs, traditions, language and mingle with them as equals and be faithful to the special vocation of the lowest place. While at Tamanrasset, he would write down the programme of life in his diary (*Carnets de Tamanrasset*, 188):

To make myself all things to all - to laugh with those who laugh, to weep with those who weep, to bring them all to JESUS. To put myself in condescension at the door step of everyone, in order to attract everyone to JESUS...<sup>8</sup>

One of the important aspects of his inculturation was the vast enterprise of the ethnographical and lexicographical studies that he undertook and continued for twelve years. He became a linguist and an ethnographer not to satisfy his old passion for scientific knowledge but for the demand of love that required him to be a brother of the Touaregs. He struck a deep friendship with Moussa Ag Amastane, the Chief of the Touaregs, and with the young man Ouksem Ag Chikkat. He sent them to France for a certain period of time as an exchange of friendship that they had offered him. With

6 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

7 *Retraite faite a Nazareth*, 5-15 November 1897, in *La demiere Place: Retraites en Terre Sainte*, Vol. I, Paris, Nouvelle Cite, 1995, p. 19.

8 *Diaires et Note*, 1905 -1916, in *Carnets de Tamanrasset*, Paris, Nouvelle Cite, 1993, p. 188.

this gesture he wanted to make them understand that the choice of their French friend to live at Tamanrasset as an *El mesquine*, a poor man (Cf. Bazin, 335) was not meant for any propaganda or to make himself accepted by the Touaregs. It was meant as a clear sign of true brotherhood, and a love that needed to expand itself and make others participate in the most intimate realities of his life. As a spokesman he defended the rights of the poor and the oppressed and to this end he didn't mince words to make appeals against the abuse of justice by those in power (CDP, 276-277):

It is not for us to get involved in worldly government. And no one is more convinced of that than I am. But we must love justice and hate evil, and when the worldly government commits a deep injustice towards those who are in some way under our care (...) we must tell them so [...] For we are the ones who on earth represent justice and truth, and we do not have the right to be 'sleeping sentinels' and 'dumb watchdogs' and the 'useless shepherds' (...) I do not want to be a bad shepherd or a dumb watchdog. I am afraid I might sacrifice JESUS for my peace and in quiet I am so fond of, or for my laziness and natural timidity...'

His effort of 'africanisation' was much more than being a mere adaptation to exterior realities of life among the Touaregs. It was a necessity and a sincere proof of his love of service and brotherhood. It was part and parcel of his vocation to realise this dream of brotherhood among men, becoming their brother and friend, a touareg among touaregs. The love of Christ spurred him on in this process of inculturation among the Touaregs and made him a brother and friend of the poor and the oppressed.

### **Evangelization and its conception: an evolution**

It is difficult to understand his idea about evangelisation without looking at it from the point of view of his spiritual journey, and without seeing clearly that he had a 'conversion' from a certain conception of evangelisation to another. Even after the conversion of October 1886, Brother Charles was headstrong, impetuous, arduous and rigorous in character. But the Christmas of 1907 he was confined to his bed and could not even raise himself without risking a fit of breathlessness. He was totally helpless and felt that the end was near. Up till then science and its experimental method marked him. He was precise in everything and very much enthusiastic for science.

His exploration to Morocco and later on his works on the Sahara was on scientific models. He transposed this model in his first manner of conceiving evangelization. He had different 'strategies' to conquer Morocco, as he would write to Henry de Castries: 'What point to choose to try this little foundation? [...] The point that is best placed to make a corner, in order to penetrate later on, closer to the side of Morocco which is

most suitable for Evangelisation'.<sup>10</sup> Charles wanted to be in the vanguard, to be the first among priests - the first priest according to him - to penetrate Morocco. At this time evangelisation meant conquering an entire region, a country, for the Church. He went about this task with enthusiasm, as he was well prepared in this way of doing things. Charles was reduced to utter helplessness due to his physical illness in 1907 and the fact of not being able to celebrate Holy Mass, as he did not have the permission as yet to do so alone. He could only see the failure of his work and even of his own life, because he was not as yet truly converted. He realised that the means that he was using up till now were not the ones that Jesus would use. In this state of mind Charles confided to Mgr. Guerin and spoke of the means that Jesus, his *Sole model* used and still continues to use to save the world (CS, 578):

The means Jesus used at his birth in the Manger, at Nazareth and on the Cross are these: *poverty, utter lowliness, humiliation, disownment, persecution, suffering, and the cross*. These are our arms, the ones used by our divine Bridegroom, who asks us to let him continue his life in us, he who is the only Lover, the only Spouse, the only Saviour and also the only Wisdom and the only Truth [...] Let us follow him our *sole model* and we are sure to do much good, for, in that case it will not be we who live but he who lives in us. Our acts will no longer be our own, human and frail, but his divinely efficacious acts...<sup>11</sup>

The next nine years of his life he would follow another method of evangelisation. From hence forward he would become a man of great peace and hope. Writing to his bishop in 1908, he would have touch upon this change of perspective in his evangelisation (CS, 624):

There is a word in the Holy Scripture, which I think, we must, always remember: Jerusalem was rebuilt in *difficult times* (Daniel).

We must learn to work all our life in *difficult situations*... The difficulties are not a passing phenomenon that allow us to go through life like a squall for us to be able do things when the times will be calm; this is normal for our life; it is necessary to consider all our life, the good things that we want to do, in *difficult situations* [...] We must not measure our works by our weakness but our efforts by our works', [...] 'Either God will be glorified in this, or I will be scorned in this; in both ways, I am the gainer'. In fact, if the efforts that one puts in for the salvation of souls are without success, their failure makes happier the one who does them. Failures make us more similar to JESUS.. ?<sup>12</sup>

10 J Dampierre, (ed.), *Lettres a Henry de Castries*, Paris, Grasset, 1938, p. 85.

11 A Chatelard, et al., (eds.), *Correspondences Sahariennes - Lettres inedites aux Peres blancs et aux Saeurs blanches* (1901-1916), Paris, Cerf, 1998, p. 578.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 624.

Brother Charles envisaged a new conception of mission, the mission of the Church in the world of today. It was impossible for him to evangelise directly. Brother Charles creatively brought a solution to this problem through the mystery of Nazareth: thirty years of life that Jesus lived at Nazareth before starting his life of preaching the Gospel. During these thirty years He shared the life, joys and sorrows of the inhabitants of his village. The Word had to wait thirty years. It was not a time lost. He shared silently the life of the people. For Brother Charles, the mystery of the Incarnation continues through the Eucharist and through priests, religious, and laity who share the lives of the people, their work, their joys and sufferings. Eucharist nourishes in us a way of being that prolongs the presence of Jesus at Nazareth among the people (DAFS, 649-650):

To save us God came to us, and he became one of us. From Annunciation to his Ascension, He lived among us intimate both with those who were the closest to him and those farthest. Each day and each hour in the Eucharist for the salvation of souls, He continues to come to us, to mix with us, to live among us with those who are most abandoned and far away. In this way, we must work for the salvation of souls: to go to them, to become one of them, and to live among those who are famili'ar and with those who are far away...<sup>13</sup>

Brother Charles gave a great value to the role of the laity in the work of evangelisation. He believed that the apostolate is in no way an affair of some specialists and every Christian is called to be an apostle.

At Tamanrasset, he awaited the coming of many good people and exemplary Christians of every profession with their heart given to Jesus. He would also desire to have incognito missionary priests of whom no one would know of their true identity. They would go through unnoticed as cultivators, business people and learned men. He wanted them to be the living witnesses of the Gospel and preach the Gospel in silence. Clarifying their role as missionaries he stressed on the importance of being rather than doing (DAFS, 645):

One does good not so much in the measure of what one says and does, but in the measure of what one is, in the measure of the grace that accompanies our actions, in the measure in which Jesus lives in us, in the measure in which our acts are acts of Jesus working in and through us. The degree of our personal sanctification will be that of the good produced by our prayers, our penance, our examples, our acts of goodness, our zealous works ...<sup>14</sup>

13 *Directoire de l'Association des Freres et Saeurs du Sacre-Coeur de Jesus, 1902, in Reglements et Directoire, Paris, Nouvelle Cite, 1995, pp. 649 - 650* 19°2'

14 *Ibid.*, p. 645.

In 1908, resolving to take for himself as a rule the life of Nazareth in everything with all its simplicity and greatness, he remarked: 'No habit, like Jesus at Nazareth, no cloister, like Jesus at Nazareth, [...] No less than eight hours of work a day (manual or other sorts, but manual as much as possible), like Jesus at Nazareth; no large landholdings, no large dwelling, no great expenses, not even large alms, but the lost utter poverty in everything - like Jesus at Nazareth'.<sup>15</sup>

### **Different dimensions of Evangelization**

Charles understood that the time was not ripe enough for the direct evangelisation of the North African peoples especially the Touaregs. Therefore he limited himself to the simple method of Nazareth that is to the apostolate of presence. He concretised this apostolate of presence by inserting himself into the local context, by being one with the people and living among them to be a witness of Jesus and a saviour with Him but at the same time being discreet and prudent.

We find a profound missionary orientation in the life of Brother Charles. In the forty chapters of the Rule for the Little Brothers of 1899, he insisted that the fraternities should be harbours of love where the Sacred Heart of Jesus shines. He wanted these fraternities in the that by mission lands among the most unfortunate in order to light that Jesus came to bring in this world. He further says devoting themselves for the salvation of souls, the Little Brothers are to see in every human being a soul to be saved.

### **Apostolate of insertion among the people**

In the Saharan mission Brother Charles came to understand more clearly the significance of 'Nazareth'. It was to become 'of the country 'little', as a brother to all whom he encountered everyday. Being fascinated by the Incarnation mystery, Charles was struck by the fact that Jesus shared our human situation: our simple ordinariness with its daily routine of work, monotony and anonymity, as also the poverty and abjection of so many. In the *Directoire*, he clearly put forward his thought about this type of apostolate (DAFS, 650):

We should be the first to go to them, as often, they keep themselves at a distance. We must try to befriend them, get their confidence, inspire in them esteem, enduring affection and some patience that are required to establish a close contact and friendly relations with them, and then to do, at the same time, all that is possible for us, for the salvation of souls. It is all that we must do for the unbelievers...<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Carnets de Tamanrasset*, Op. Cit., p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> *Directoire de l'Association*, Op. Cit., p. 650



When he struck a friendship with Moussa Ag Amastane, he agreed with him on three most necessary things for the development of the people: instruction, the habit of work, and the reconstitution of the family. He also discussed the advantages and risks of technical progress and of cultural changes. He dedicated all his time and energy to the learning of their language in order to be able to talk to them. Thus he prepared the ground for a veritable ethnological work. Above all, Brother Charles showed a passionate concern for the Touareg language and culture, spending many hours, day and night, to record exactly and in minute detail, the words, the verses, the customs and the traditions of the Touaregs. The sheer volume and precision of this immense work is astonishing. It is indeed a true mark of realistic love. Commenting on this type of apostolate Ian Latham remarks (Latham, *The vision of the Gospel*, 34):

It's worth noting, too, that Charles' vast ambition of unive friendship was always rooted in the simplest acts of shared living- smiling to visitors (something remembered long after his death by many persons), giving time for chatting (sometimes hours of precious time), helping when needed and being ready to receive help in one's own need (Charles, with his temperament, took some years to learn this), showing interest and giving information on customs and traditions (Charles study of Touareg culture in all its aspects is well known, but he was equally ready to inform his hearers about French ways, not to impose them but to share). He allowed the higher reaches of friendship to build on the ordinary acts of human intercourse: we would call it the 'Nazarene' approach...<sup>17</sup>

On 21 February 1915, Brother Charles wrote a letter to his friend Louis Massignon on the subject of the statutes that he wished to abridge. He wanted the members of the Association to work for the material development of the people among whom they find themselves: 'There is an impulse to be given, a collective action to be organised, private works to be determined, carried out, and encouraged...'.<sup>18</sup> Eight months before his death Brother Charles insisted on the 'progress' that had to be brought about in the French colonies: 'The progress must be intellectual, moral and material'.<sup>19</sup>

But as for Charles, he never imposed on others his own civilisation. Rather, rooted in a shared life, he became one of them and prayed with them and for them. Like Jesus, his Beloved, he sought to identify with, the people as much as possible. Identified with the Touaregs, his prayer for them was inseparable from his life with them. His life with them culminated in the offering of his life for them, first in the living out of each day, and, then finally, in the complete self-offering of freely accepting death. In this sense, evangelisation, as conceived by Charles was to be inserted in a precise context and realised through goodness, kindness, friendliness, the example of virtue, by humility and mildness.

<sup>17</sup> I Latham, *The Vision of the Gospel that filled the Mind and Heart of Brother Charles*, Kent, Jesus Caritas Fraternity of Priests, 1993, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> S Chauleur, (ed.), *Charles De Faucauld et Mere Saint Michel*, Paris, Saint Paul, 1946, pp. 177 -179.

<sup>19</sup> *Les Amities Sahariennes du Pere de Foucauld*, Vol. I, p. 130.

### **The Apostolate of divine presence**

A characteristic trait of Brother Charles' spirituality that intensely transformed his life was his *personal relationship* with Jesus. For him Jesus is the *One who is present*. This personal relationship with Jesus' presence in Word and Sacrament grew deeper as he journeyed along his life. This idea of 'presence' became the hallmark of his life and apostolate. Like St John the Baptist he felt that his mission was to prepare the way for the coming of God's Kingdom. In this perspective, he was convinced that evangelisation should be carried out not through preaching but through a presence (LHC, 84-85):

It is evangelisation, not by words, but by the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament, the offering of the divine Sacrifice, prayer, penance, the practice of the evangelical virtues, charity - a fraternal and universal charity - sharing the last piece of bread with the poor, all guests, all the unknown who come and to receive everyone as a beloved brother...<sup>20</sup>

Already at Beni-Abb<sup>s</sup> he grew into the recognition of Jesus' presence in the person who came to the fraternity, whoever that might have been, and especially in the 'least'. In fact the *Eucharistic presence* and the *Neighbour presence* were explicitly connected. Regarding this he would write to Louis Massignon a few months before his death. The One who said, 'this is my body and this is my blood' also said 'whatever you did to one of the least of these you did it to me' - no word of the Gospel had more impressed and transformed his life. No one can pretend to be in love with Jesus without having at the same time an authentic love for his neighbour in need. Both of these types of love are intimately linked. Hence the one who loves God grows spontaneously in the love of neighbour (LLM, 83):

To love, to love God and our neighbour, to love our neighbour to arrive through that to the love of God, are the two loves that cannot exist one without the other. To grow in one is to grow in the other. How to acquire the love of God? By practicing charity towards all[...]<sup>21</sup>

Animated by this love, Brother Charles shared it with everyone in an incessant gift of himself to others, especially the poorest and the least. There was no dichotomy in him between contemplation and apostolate. It was from Jesus in the Eucharist that he learnt the lesson of His hidden life at Nazareth. It would be a decisive lesson for his method of apostolate in the Sahara (RE, 29-30):

During these 30 years I did not stop instructing you - not by words but by my silence and examples. What was I teaching you? I was teaching you primarily, that it is possible to do good to men - great good, immense good, divine good - without words, without sermons, without fuss, but by silence, and by giving

20 J Dampierre, (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 84 - 85.

21 J F Six, (ed.) *Op. Cit.*, p. 83.

*good example... what kind of example? That of piety, duties towards God lovingly fulfilled, goodness towards all men, tenderness towards those around us, and of domestic duties fulfilled in holiness. The example of poverty, of work, of abjection, of recollection, of withdrawal, of obscurity, of a hidden life in God, of a life of prayer, of penance, of withdrawal, completely lost in God and buried deep in Him...*<sup>22</sup>

### **The Apostolate of Friendship and Goodness**

Brother Charles perceived the presence of God's 'goodness' everywhere. This filled his life with gratitude and humility. In the Saharan mission he tried to put into practice this 'goodness' of God's love among the Touaregs. In his first trip to France with a view to establishing the Lay Association, Brother Charles was struck by the advice of Fr. Huvelin as regards the method to be used by him and the members of the Association in their apostolate mission among the Touaregs. So much so he wrote it down in his personal journal (*Carnets de Tamanrasset*, 188):

My apostolate must be one of *goodness*. I must make people say this when they see me: "This man is so good that his religion must be good." If someone asks me why I am gentle and good, I must reply, "Because I serve One who is much better than I am. If only you knew how good my Master Jesus is." I want to be so good that people will say, "If that is the servant, how then, is the Master JESUS"? ...<sup>23</sup>

Here we are far from an intrepid and overwhelming Foucauld of his youth. He did not want to follow the old missionary method of proselytisation. In the school of Nazareth he had learnt to dispose off his alms and renounce all that is connected with power. At a time when it was not rare to hear people say 'outside the Church, no salvation', he confided to a Protestant friend that he was not there to convert the Touaregs at a full sloop, but to try to understand them. He was convinced that God in his goodness would welcome into heaven all those who lived good and upright lives without the need of being Roman Catholics.

He never talked to them directly about Our Lord Jesus, as that would just make them go away. In order to gain the confidence of the Touaregs, he made friendship with them by rendering them little services. He always encouraged them discreetly to abide by natural religion. In 1910, he built a hermitage up in the mountains on the Assekrem plateau. In 1911, he would spend several months up there on that enchanting plateau. But what made him happiest was the possibility that he had of deepening his contacts with the Touaregs (*LMB*, 200):

I am very pleased with my stay here. People come to see me every four or five days at least, even though the camps are far from here at the moment because

<sup>22</sup> *Retraite de huit jours a Ephrem, 1898, in Crier L'Evangile: Retraites en Terre Sainte, Vol. II, Paris, Nouvelle Cite, 1974, pp. 29 - 30.*

<sup>23</sup> *Carnets de Tamanrasset, Op. Cit., p. 188.*

of the drought. Since my visitors come from a day, a day and a half or two days away, they finish the day with me and sleep here. A meal or two in common, a day or day and a half spent together draw you closer than a large number of visits a half-hour or an hour long, as they are at Tamanrasset...<sup>24</sup>

Wishing to imitate his Beloved in everything, he set on a programme of 'goodness', 'love' and 'friendship' to carry out his apostolate among the natives. Later on writing to Joseph Hours he specified still further as regards his apostolate (LJH, in CCF 14, 8-9):

Above all, to see every human being as a brother [...] We must banish any spirit of triumphalism. Every Christian must see each human being as a *beloved brother or sister* [...] Be charitable, mild, and humble towards all people. This is what JESUS taught us to do. Do not set out to *conquer* anybody. JESUS taught us to go 'like lambs among wolves', and not to speak roughly or spitefully, not to throw insults, not to take up arms [...] in having kindness and friendliness towards everyone, in rendering them all possible services, in having contacts with them that show affection, in caring for them and treating them as brothers and sisters...<sup>25</sup>

This 'goodness' was not just a mere sentiment but rather an 'art' and a 'science'. Goodness without intelligence runs the risk of not respecting the other by reducing every encounter with the person to something 'emotional' only. The 'goodness' that Charles had was 'ingenious' and very much inventive. In his Rule for the Lay Association, Brother Charles constantly repeats the word 'goodness'. It was a gratuitous goodness for the welfare of others, without any second thoughts for external conversion, that is, goodness without any ideology. Brother Charles never used any coercion towards others in carrying out his apostolate but only benevolent service of love and goodness, a sign and sacrament of God's goodness and of divine charity for his Touaregs.

### **Methods of Discretion and Graduality: Pedagogy of 'Delay' and 'Patience'**

Brother Charles had the sense of 'delay' and patience, the sense of the Incarnation of God in history. He was well aware of the historical context of North Africa and perceived that any direct evangelisation would meet with resistance and lead to his expulsion from the country. Already in the retreat at Ephraim he had understood through his meditation of the Visitation mystery that he was called to preach the Gospel in silence and through his life like Mary, the Mother of God who carrying Jesus in her womb, sanctified the house of her cousin Elisabeth. In this regard it is indeed remarkable to see how he dealt with the indigenous population in general, using a lot of patience and never being indiscreet (*Carnet de Beni-Abbès*, 1904, 116-129):

24 G Gorree (ed.), *Lettres a MMe de Bondy: De la Trappe a Tamanrasset*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1966, p. 200.

25 J F Six, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 8 - 9.

Try to put them into confidence and in friendship so that confidence and friendship having established, later on this may bear fruits progressively and make way for better teachings [...] For this, first of all, one needs to acquire their esteem by an exemplary and holy life; then gain their friendship by goodness, patience, services [...] Try to have with them as much relations as possible to establish this confidence and friendship; but in this relations one must be discreet and without curiosity. For the moment, one needs to evade theological discussions and theological conversations as it leads to more of curiosity than good will; to respond briefly without entering into any discussion; to remain rather in the natural theology and without any particular motive not to expose any Christian dogmas [...] in speaking about God and of eternal things, but never temporal, not to speak much to each one, and in inculcating constantly in all, the natural law and the evangelical moral...<sup>26</sup>

Brother Charles wrote to Louis Massignon exhorting him to use discretion in evangelising: 'You will know the population; do not speak to them about dogmas but you must make yourself loved and you will become a friend to all'<sup>27</sup>. After his first trip to France in 1909 he wrote to his friend Henry de Castries that he was going to take up his daily task again: 'All these to bring them to Christianity, God knows when, perhaps in this century'<sup>28</sup>. There does not arise for him anymore the question of converting or baptising in a great hurry. As he would write to his bishop, Mgr. Guerin:

To preach Jesus to the Touaregs, I do not think Jesus wants this, neither I nor anyone else. This method will delay and not enhance their conversion. This will make them defiant, distanced them rather than bring them closer. One needs to go there with great prudence, gradually make acquaintance with them, make friendship with them and then later, little by little, one may be able to go further with a few privileged souls who will come and see more than others, and then they will attract others. Above all, it is necessary to instruct these poor souls...<sup>29</sup>

### **Life of Witness**

Charles followed the path of the Incarnation to imitate Jesus his Unique Model. It was the trajectory of a life, the power of whose inspiration animated his soul, that which always spurred him on forward, and which finally led him to Tamanrasset, to a life more and more simple, more and more free, and more and more inserted among the people who surrounded him. It was, probably towards this life that he always looked forward to. He had understood the passionate love of God for wo/man, his extraordinary zeal for all human concerns. Charles firmly believed that the Kingdom

26 B Abbes, *Meditations sur le Saint Eoangile, 2 fevrier - 22 avril 1905, in L'Esprit de Jesus*, Paris, Nouvelle Cite, 1978, pp. 116 - 129.

27 J F Six, *Op. Cit.*, p. 110.

28 J Dampierre, (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 182.

29 A Chatelard, (ed.) *Op. Cit.*, pp. 605 - 606.

of God was among us. It was this that gave him power of enterprise, initiative and of intrepidity. He felt that he was not called to preach the Gospel, but rather to live it in order to proclaim it with his life. In his life among the Touaregs, Charles accomplished very little, as he himself observed (LAC, 43):

I did not make one serious conversion since seven year that I am there - two Baptisms, but God knows how things are and how the baptised souls will be [...] As a serious conversion it's zero; and I would say something more sad, it is the more I go ahead, the more I am convinced that for the moment, there is no need of looking to make isolated conversions (except the particular cases)...<sup>30</sup>

But this apparent failure did not in any way discourage Charles as he was convinced that his apostolate was one of silent presence of 'goodness' and 'friendship'. As he explained that one does good not by what one says or does but by what one is by the grace which accompanies his actions, by the way that Jesus lives within him, by the way that his actions are Jesus' actions, working in and through the person. In everything, Charles asked himself two things: 'What would Our Lord do? And do it'. It's your only rule, your absolute rule...<sup>31</sup>

In a world dominated by the pursuit of efficiency, organisation, maximum production and a thirst for possession, Charles proclaims the value of humility and humble things. He emphasised on the primacy of 'being' rather than 'having'. He spoke of the importance of being a 'living Gospel' and 'His image' and in this way to be a 'silent witness' with one's own life. People who are far from Jesus should, without books or words, be able to know the Gospel by seeing a person's life. Recalling the great importance of this 'living witness' Charles proclaimed in clear terms the philosophy of life that guided his life to the very end (MSE, 225):

All our life, as silent that it may be, the life of Nazareth, the life of the desert, also the public life, must a preaching of the Gospel through example; all our existence, all our being must cry the Gospel from the roof tops; all our person must breathe Jesus; all our actions all our life should cry that we belong to Jesus, must present an image of the evangelical life; our entire being must be a living proclamation, a reflection of Jesus, a perfume of Jesus, something that cries Jesus, that shows Jesus, that shines as an image of Jesus. That all our life may cry Jesus and the Gospel from the rooftops! That when one sees us, one sees the faithful image of Jesus...<sup>32</sup>

30 *XXV lettres inedites de Foucauld a l'abbe Caron*, Paris, Bonne Presse, 1947, p. 43.

31 *Notes detaches diverses, 1888 - 1916 in Voyageur dans la nuit: Notes de spiritualite (188 - 1916)*, Paris, Nouvelle Cite, 1979, p. 33.

32 *Meditations sur les Saints Evangiles, 1897 - 1899 in La Bonte de Dieu*, Vol. I, Paris, Nouvelle Cite, 1989, p. 225.

In conclusion we can say that Brother Charles by choosing to follow this method of witnessing departed significantly from the traditional methods of mission. Rather than establishing big institutions or proclaiming the Gospel with words, he aspired to evangelise according to the model of Jesus during His hidden years at Nazareth: through dialogue, friendship, and living witness. The best witness to the Gospel, he believed, was a holy life.

### Church's Teachings on the Pastoral Formation of Priests

There are deep and rapid transformations in the societies and cultures of our age with the phenomena of religious pluralism, practical and existential atheism which coincides with a secular outlook on life and human destiny, utilitarian and technocratic culture which is inclined to assess the importance of things and even of people in relation to their immediate 'usefulness', and other problematic or negative elements that are a cause of alarm for the Church. Immersed in this reality the Church feels the urgent need of a formation that is specifically pastoral to meet the demands of the actual context. As the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo Vobis* remarks (PDV, 5):

For our part we must therefore seek to be as open as possible to light from on high from the Holy Spirit, in order to discover the tendencies of contemporary society, recognize the deepest spiritual needs, determine the most important concrete tasks and the pastoral methods to adopt, and thus respond adequately to human expectations...<sup>33</sup>

The whole formation that is imparted to the future priests is 'pastoral' in character and must be directed to make them enter into communion with the *charity of Christ* the Good Shepherd so that they can become true shepherds of souls after the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church speaks of a systematic study of pastoral theology coupled with pastoral 'experiences' or 'training' that would direct the candidates to an inner source, the ever-deeper communion with the pastoral charity of Jesus which constitutes the principle and driving force of the priestly ministry. Hence pastoral formation cannot be reduced to a mere acquisition of some pastoral techniques, but most of all the candidates should be initiated into the sensitivity of being a shepherd and at the same time helped to inculcate the very *sentiments and behaviour of Christ* the Good Shepherd.

In order to imitate the charitable zeal of Christ, and be His visible signs, the future priests and religious leaders should inculcate a preferential and *unbounded generosity and love* for the poor and the marginalized, thus transcending all 'utilitarian' considerations.

<sup>33</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day, 25 March 1992, in AAS 84 (1992) p. 5.

With a *life of self-giving love*<sup>34</sup> they got to care for the deformed image of God on the faces of their brothers and sisters, faces disfigured by hunger, faces disillusioned by political promises, faces humiliated by seeing their culture despised, faces frightened by constant and indiscriminate violence. Loving with the Heart of Christ they got to make charity as their programme of life. Regarding this the prophetic words of Pope Paul VI are very significant (*Evangelica Testificatio*, 498):

Without this concrete sign there would be a danger that the charity which animates the entire Church would grow cold, that the salvific paradox of the Gospel would be blunted and that the 'salt' of faith would lose its saviour in a world undergoing secularization...<sup>35</sup>

The candidates should be trained to understand the nature of the Church, which is essentially 'mystery', 'communion' and 'mission'. Church as a 'mystery' is a divine work, fruit of the Spirit of Christ, an effective sign of grace, the presence of the Trinity in the Christian community. This calls for a prophetic witness to the primacy of God and the truths of the Gospel. Because of this nothing can come before personal love of Jesus Christ and of the poor in whom He lives.<sup>36</sup> Awareness of the Church as a 'communion' will prepare the future priests to carry out their pastoral work with a community spirit and in heartfelt collaboration with different members of the Church.<sup>37</sup> Highlighting the great role of this communion for priests and religious *Vita Consecrata* has this to say (VC, 46):

The sense of ecclesial communion, developing into a *spirituality of communion*, promotes a way of thinking, speaking and acting which enables the Church to grow in depth and extension. The life of communion in fact 'becomes a *sign* for all the world and a compelling *force* that leads people to faith in Christ... In this way communion leads to mission, and itself becomes mission'; indeed, *communion begets communion*: in essence it is a *communion that is missionary*...<sup>38</sup>

Awareness of the Church as a 'missionary' communion will help them to love and live the essential missionary dimension of the Church and her different pastoral activities. Therefore it is essential to inculcate a *sense of mission*. The task of devoting themselves wholly to 'mission' is therefore included in their call. Being at the service of God and humanity, they are called to a life of witness and witness of works. Both mirror Christ who is at one and the same time consecrated to the glory of his brothers and

34 *Vita Consecrata*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World, 25 March 1996 in AAS 88 (1996), p. 75.

35 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio*, on the Renewal of Religious Life, 29-VI-1971 in AAS 59 (1971), p. 498.

36 Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 84.

37 *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 59.

38 *Vita Consecrata*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 46.



sisters.<sup>39</sup>Regarding the importance of this life of witness *Vita Consecrata* remarks (VC, 72):

Indeed, more than in external works, the mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness. This is the challenge; this is the primary task of the consecrated life! The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all'.<sup>40</sup>

The proclamation of Christ 'is the permanent priority of mission', and is directed toward conversion, that is, to full and sincere allegiance to Christ and his Gospel. In this context of missionary activity the process of inculturation and inter-religious dialogue have an important role to play. Today, there is a strongly felt demand for the inculturation of the message of faith.<sup>41</sup> Being an eminently 'pastoral problem', this should enter more broadly and carefully into the formation of the candidates to the priesthood and religious life. It is very important that in the whole intellectual and human formation the dimension of inculturation be seen as necessary and essential.<sup>42</sup> In this context a greater emphasis is to be laid on *intellectual formation* as it enhances a deeper knowledge of the divine mysteries and helps to face squarely the challenge of the *new evangelisation*.<sup>43</sup> In a climate of religious indifference, scepticism, pluralism and the wide spread cultural situation of subjectivism, commitment to study is a must for pastoral reasons. As *Vita Consecrata* reminds us (VC, 98):

There is a need for a renewed and *loving commitment to intellectual life*, for dedication to study as a means of integral formation and as a path of asceticism which is extraordinarily timely, in the face of present-day cultural diversity...<sup>44</sup>

In order to be an effective pastor of souls, future priests should cultivate a series of human qualities. These qualities are needed for them to be balanced people, strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities. They need to be educated to love the truth, to be loyal, to respect every person, to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to be genuinely compassionate, to be men of integrity, to be balanced in judgement and behaviour.<sup>45</sup> They should be trained to relate to others, to be affable, hospitable, sincere in words and heart, to be prudent and discreet, to be generous and ready to serve, to be capable of opening themselves to clear and brotherly

39 The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* on the Church, 21 November 1964, in AAS 57 (1965), p. 46.

40 *Vita Consecrata*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 72.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

42 Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 55.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

44 *Vita Consecrata*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 98.

45 Cf. *Optatam Totius*, The Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life, 28 October 1965 in AAS 58 (1966), p. 28.

relationships and of encouraging the same in others, and quick to understand, forgive and console.<sup>46</sup>

### **Some Pedagogical Considerations**

The life that Charles lived was a 'living memory' of Christ's paschal mystery. His life, which was rooted in faith, hope and charity, was a transparent and joyful witness of this 'living memory' of Christ. By living the Gospel radically he was able to give a prophetic witness to the primacy of God as his only Love, only Possession and only Realisation. In a culture that gives primacy to 'doing' and 'producing', Brother Charles teaches us the primacy of 'being' rather than 'doing' or 'activity'. His apostolate that was centred on 'being' derived its inspiration from the logic of the Incarnation mystery.

### **The inculcation of pastoral charity as the internal principle**

This *Pastoral charity* constitutes the internal and dynamic principle capable of uniting the diverse pastoral activities of the priest, and given the socio-cultural context, it is an indispensable instrument for drawing wo/men to a life in Grace. Informed by such charity, the ministerial activity must be a manifestation of the charity of Christ. With this charity the priest will be able to testify through his very life and conduct the total self-giving of himself to the poor, the marginalized and the 'least'.<sup>47</sup>

Brother Charles wishing to live fully this passion of God's love for humanity and in wanting to imitate the compassionate love of Jesus, dedicated his time and energy for the service of those who were the 'farthest' and the most 'abandoned', the Touaregs and poured out his life for them. For he had declared that 'we will be more members for Jesus, that we may be more saviours for other people, of all men, in each instant of our existence, and that each of our acts, thought, word or action may be more useful for the salvation of men' (*L'Esprit de Jésus*, 148). This total self-giving in order to 'save souls' demanded innumerable sacrifices and finally this cost his life. We have an eloquent testimony of this 'self-giving' love of Brother Charles from a significant letter of his Muslim friend, Moussa Ag Amastane to him after Moussa's memorable visit of France: 'and you are at Tamanrasset as a poor man'.<sup>48</sup>

The future priests and religious leaders are to be inculcated with this *pastoral charity* that animates the whole Church and in turn they will be called upon to educate others according to Christ's example of total self-giving. Those in charge of their formation should see to their proper training in charity and particularly in the *preferential love for the 'poor'* in whom our faith discovers Jesus and a merciful love for sinners. Above all their life should be an image of the memory of Christ by living in deep communion

46 *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 43.

47 Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, The Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Life and Ministry of Priests, 7 December 1965, in *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 14.

48 R Bazin, *Charles de Foucauld, explorateur du Maroc, ermite au Sahara*, Paris, Plon, 1921, p. 335.

with the very sentiments and behaviour of Christ the Good Shepherd: 'Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus'.<sup>49</sup>

### **Primacy of Being rather than Doing or Achieving**

In a highly consumerist culture, Charles' witness of life on the *pre-eminence of being rather than doing or achieving* goes against the prevailing mentality of our contemporary culture. In order to be the living witnesses of the Gospel it is not what one says or does that matters but what one is through the grace of Jesus that accompanies his actions. The degree of his personal holiness of life will produce greater apostolic fruit through his prayer, penance, exemplary life, and his acts of goodness and above his passion to save souls.<sup>50</sup>

To achieve this goal the formators are to train the future priests and religious to a life of total self-giving poured out in pure love for others. They should be taught to transcend all 'utilitarian' considerations and inculcate that 'unbounded generosity, as expressed in a life that is spent in loving and serving the Lord'<sup>51</sup> in order to devote themselves completely to Jesus and to the 'poor'. God to save humanity became flesh and became one of us in everything except sin. For thirty years He led a 'hidden life' at Nazareth to be taught by human realities of poverty, hardships, work, hunger, thirst, weariness, obscurity, solitude, fraternity, friendship, joy, anguish and so on. For the salvation of souls He continues to live among us through the most intimate contact of the Eucharist.

The future priests in order to be His effective ministers must follow the path of the Incarnation and give primacy to what they are rather than what they can achieve through various works. The seminary ambient should be such as to live some of the important values that will enhance the primacy of 'being' such as: the capacity to *relate to each other in friendship* that leads to 'communion', the capacity to *share joys and sorrows*, the capacity to *feel with others* and to be *compassionate*, the value of the *presence of goodness*, and the value of *gratuity* in a culture where everything is remunerated.

### **The Inculturation of the Message of Faith**

In the context in which we live today, priests and religious leaders are invited to accept the challenges seen as 'voice of God calling to attention the Church here and now'. In the first place, it is a call to discern the signs of the times, to be attentive to culture or the prevalent cultures, a dialogue, a capacity to listen and to respond, and an 'inculturation'. Secondly, it consists in the preoccupation of making a clear evangelical proposal to the society through their life-style and especially by a radical living out of the Gospel. This implies the possession of a strong personality, an awareness of having

49 Saint Paul, Letter to the Philippians, Chapter 2:5 in *New King James Bible*, Nashville, 1982, p. 815.

50 Cf. *Directoire de l'Association des Freres et Soeurs du Sacre-Coeur de Jesus*, 1902 in *Reglements et Di Directoire*, Paris, Nouvelle Cite, 1995, p. 645.

51 *Vita Consecrata*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 104.

something important to present and to propose to the society, a great faith in the Gospel and its values. In short, it is a call to the *inculturation of the message of faith*. The Church considers this an 'eminently pastoral problem'.<sup>52</sup> In the present diverse circumstances, in which in many parts of the world, the Christian religion is considered as something 'foreign' to cultures, the *evangelisation of cultures and the inculturation of the message of faith* are to be seen as necessary and essential.

Brother Charles, too, had to encounter a similar context, but through his innovative methods of evangelisation he shared in the 'saving work' of Christ. Imitating the logic of the Incarnation, he realised the process of 'inculturation' and became 'a Touareg among the Touaregs' in order to attract them and bring them to Jesus. In our multi-religious contexts there is a danger of either syncretism or a simple adaptation of the proclamation of the Gospel message. A suitable formation to the future priests and religious through a genuine theology inspired by the Catholic principles of 'inculturation' that are linked with the mystery of the Incarnation and with Christian anthropology is a must.<sup>53</sup>

### **A Joyful and a Transparent Witness of the Gospel Life**

Another important pedagogical guideline that Brother Charles suggests for the formation of future priests and religious is his *joyful and transparent witness of the evangelical life*. His life was a living image of the *passion of Christ*. He took to heart the command of the Jesus: '*Be my witnesses*'. His life was a prophetic witness not only of the message of Christ but also the historical form of his life. From his life it is clear to us that he seems to have understood the unique relevance of His life so that he was able to cry out with his life and example, the Gospel to the people of the Sahara and proclaim, 'Jesus is Lord'.

During the years of formation care should be taken to see to the *affirmation of the culture of the primacy of God* in the lives of the future priests by modelling their lives on Christ. Secondly, *to make them aware of the certitude of the presence of the Power of the Holy Spirit*. The second aspect is important because the more or less 'hedonistic' culture-mentality of our times somehow affects the priests and the religious too and erodes silently their residue resistances, contributes to the loss of enthusiasm and then leads to disarray and disorientation.

The certitude of the superior force of the Spirit instead produces the fruits of joy, serenity and perfect happiness in spite of all sorts of difficulties. Today the world hungers for this type of witness of persons who do not feel frustrated for not adhering to the ways of the world. The future priests and religious are to be helped *to think like Christ, not to conform to the mentality of this age, to renew continuously their way of thinking* and thus sow the seeds of the Gospel with the witness of their lives in the contemporary culture and continue to sow also in apparent or real sterility. Nothing

52 *Pastores Dabo Vobis, Op. Cit.*, p. 55.

53 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

is useless when the Spirit is at work within us. The candidates are to be so formed that through a radical evangelical life they can be the *living images of Christ and thus become eloquent, effective and joyful witnesses of the Gospel of the Beatitudes.*

Candidates to the priesthood and religious life should be trained with special care to inculcate the values of self-control, sobriety, solidarity, and docility to God's will so 'that they may accustom themselves to living in conformity with the Crucified Christ and give up willingly those things which are lawful but not expedient'.<sup>54</sup> Against the challenges of the permissive culture of 'hedonism' 'materialism' and 'individualism', the priests and religious are those who have had a strong experience of God through 'the fatigue of thinking', of reflecting, of meditating, and 'confronting' the Gospel continually and the experience of the Gospel with the prevailing ways and the mentality of the present day cultural reality. Through their transparent lives of witness they should be able to make one feel the fascination for a God who is their only Love, their only Wealth and their only Project. This is the type of evangelical witness that Brother Charles gave to the poor and simple Touaregs of the Hoggar and they in turn saw in him a '*marabout*', that is, a 'holy man' whose philosophy of life was 'to cry the Gospel with his life'<sup>55</sup>, as he had found the secret of true and definitive happiness in God and in the service of His 'poor'.

## Conclusion

From all what we have been analysing about the spiritual legacy of Brother Charles and its relevance especially in the field of formation we see that there is a certain *life-principle* that guided his life for a cause. It was what the psychologists call 'a general project of life' for which Charles was ready to do anything. For him this 'project of life' was none other than the '*Absolute Other*' concretized in the person of Jesus, his Beloved Brother. Charles made his life an act of love for this 'project of life'. It was this vision that 're-formed' everything in him and shaped and moulded his entire life.<sup>56</sup> It was this ideal of life that enhanced his spiritual evolution. Being 'consumed by an inner fire of love' for the Person of Jesus, all his decisions were oriented towards Him as he was convinced that 'love is always obedient when its object is God'. Charles found life meaningful only from the experience of love - a love that meant 'commitment' and dedication to the sheep 'most completely lost'.

In this perspective he committed himself totally to live for Him and for His service. Through his 'silent witness' he shows us that it is only through love that one enters the fullness of life and ultimately finds happiness and fulfilment. The analysis of the fundamental coordinates of his experience, like the imitation of Jesus, universal fraternity, apostolate of presence, friendship and goodness, and a deeper and fuller obedience to the Beloved, help to bring out the important elements that are able to provoke the contemporary sensibility.

54 *Optatam Totius, Op. Cit.*, p. 9.

55 *Meditations sur les Saints Evangiles, Op. Cit.*, p. 285.

56 J Powell, *A Life-Giving Vision: How to be a Christian in Today's World*, Chicago, Tomas More, 1995, p. 11.