

An Apostolate of Friendship

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It seems a happy coincidence that I should have the privilege of speaking to you today, as the 1st of December is an important anniversary for us Little Brother of Jesus. Charles de Foucauld died on 1st December 1916, betrayed and shot at Tamanrasset in the Hoggar. The life that came to so brutal an end that day was little known at the time to the outside world, but its fecundity is seen to be greater and greater as time goes on. I shall not attempt to recount the story of it in detail; in any case, it is no doubt familiar to most of you. I shall confine myself, rather, while commenting on Father de Foucauld's spiritual evolution, to pointing to what seem to me the more original characteristics of his spirituality, and shall try to show at the same time how these have taken shape and form in a new religious family in the Church.

That Brother Charles of Jesus, as he wished to be known, should have died a complete failure, as many would have said at the time, is something rather remarkable. I doubt whether many priests have ever had so negative a record of their apostolic efforts to look back upon at the close of their lives — and Charles de Foucauld had all the time he needed to consider his existence as he knelt there on the desert sands at Tamanrasset, with his hands tied behind his back, waiting silently for the blow which was to put an end to it.

When, after several years with the Trappists, he had come to realize that he was being called towards another kind of religious life which was to be achieved elsewhere, he had also felt equally certain, with the inner certainty of intuition, that he was not meant to do this alone but in company with other religious. This was so clear in his mind that he at once started writing a rule — the rule for what he intended to call "the Little Brothers of Jesus", now known among us as the Rule of 1896. From that time on one finds him keeping himself reminded of his purpose by recording, more especially on the occasion of his annual retreats, something like this in his notebooks : " Work for the foundation of the Little Brothers and Little Sisters — this is my mission. " Meanwhile, he sent out appeals for companions to come, or be sent, to join him. While he was at Beni-Abbes, in Algeria, for instance, he made several efforts of this kind and one postulant did come, but went away again. At Beni-Abbes he also had to give up his idea of conducting an apostolic penetration into Morocco, because he could not go alone; and yet he was at the very door of that country which he had learned to love so well during his secret exploration there several years earlier. In short, the more he tried the less he succeeded, and it was surely with a feeling of sadness that he wrote in one of his last letters : " All my plans turn out to be mere bits of paper. I have not been worthy. " The last years, in his solitude at Tamanrasset, he reduced his desires and contented himself with

begging Our Lord to let him have one single companion, one single priest, who could carry on the work he had begun after he had gone. But even that he was denied; and when the end drew near, he could say to himself, with every apparent reason for certitude, that it was all over and his congregations had just been a dream.

Yet the work goes on. And since it has in fact survived and does continue, we can never forget that there lies at the root of it, first of all, a sacrifice, a sacrifice made in sheer faith by a soul whom God had led to so close a resemblance to the redemptive vocation of Christ, that he also could be allowed to die in apparent and actually all but complete failure.

I often think of Father de Foucauld's fraternity at Beni-Abbes as I found it on the occasion of my first visit. It was in 1932, while military operations were still in progress in the southern part of Morocco. The desert trails were not yet safe and a military convoy was the only way of reaching Beni-Abbes at all. I remember arriving about two o'clock in the morning after a hazardous and difficult journey, but going straight out to the fraternity in high hopes. But the sight that met my eyes was that of a chapel in ruins – that chapel where Father de Foucauld had spent so many long hours in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, where he had written so many of his well-known spiritual meditations, where he had gone deeper and deeper into his Eucharistic life – a Christian chapel which had been allowed to go to ruin. Can you imagine a more desolate scene? I, for one, can think of nothing that could symbolize failure and hopelessness more completely.

One thinks immediately, though, of Saint Teresa of Lisieux; one can hardly help comparing the two lives; for, different as they were, there is a deep similarity between them. That similarity lies, I think, in this: the two souls that God seems to have given us for guides at a time in history when immediate and effective action would appear to be more necessary than ever, the two dominant saintly figures of our time were both powerless and without influence. Saint Teresa was a sick child in a convent. Charles de Foucauld was just the opposite : a man of strength, a man with a clear, practical, orderly mind and a forceful will – a man of action, in short, who would have made a success in almost any career; but the life he deliberately chose was one where there was to be little room for any normally efficient means of influencing those around him. His one idea at the time of his conversion was to imitate Jesus at Nazareth. Just where this was to lead him we shall see in a moment. Meanwhile, let us note that he had hardly discovered the existence of God before he came to the conclusion that he could not do otherwise than live for Him alone; and here we have our clue. The one thing that explains the existence he chose, the heart and centre of it all, was a profound and intimate personal friendship between Jesus and himself. Seek as you may, I do not believe you will find any other animating motive with Charles de Foucauld, and it was clear, definite, absolute as from his first steps in the faith, and especially as from the beginning of his religious life.

If you have read Pere de Foucauld's spiritual writings at all, you will certainly agree that it would be difficult to find anything more utterly simple, more completely devoid of conscious style or literary effect. The secret of this is not only that these meditations were written for God and not for publication – that was his way of meditating, and the one thing that mars

their intimacy is the fact of their being printed – but that they are an expression of a constant and continuous relationship with Jesus which has transformed the soul of a strong man and a man of learning and culture and ability into the soul of a child. It even makes one smile sometimes to see how he pictured to himself the life of the Holy Family in Nazareth. But whatever his fancies, whatever his exaggerations, there can be no doubt but that his life was entirely governed by the desire to be a friend of Jesus, And in order to accomplish this purpose and maintain contact with Our Lord, Charles de Foucauld, with his unhesitating simplicity and his concrete logic, went straight where he felt that Jesus was always most surely to be found. Had He not indeed left two traces – or rather, something more than traces : two living mementos of His passage among us, the Gospel and the Eucharist, in which He is present? It was thus that Father de Foucauld reasoned and that was enough to enable him to find in these two realities all that he needed with which to feed and deepen and increase his friendship with Jesus. I stress this because it represents the primary aspect of his spirituality. And, once again, let me say that there is no point in searching elsewhere for his motives; there was no other; there was simply this urge to achieve friendship with Christ. What came later was merely its consequence.

Now, living the life of this 20th century, especially in the atmosphere of our modern cities, it is easy to have the feeling that the very idea of living with Jesus, and trying to obey the mysterious will of the God-Man who lived in Palestine two thousand years ago, is somewhat out of keeping with today; that, confronted with the two currents of life which seem to result from the commandment to love both God and man, centring upon the Person of Jesus is perhaps a little out-of-date, or a rather primitive conception of our relations with God, and it might after all be better to channel the whole movement of the love of God in one direction, that of acting upon mankind, realizing works of justice, establishing works of fraternal love. Again, for many of those whose duty it in fact is to do and act but who wish above all to remain faithful to God Himself, is there not the constant duality of the call to action and the call to contemplation? So a man's ordering his entire life, as did Brother Charles of Jesus, towards imitation of Christ for the sole reason that he loves Christ may seem like foolishness – unless, of course, we really believe that we have to do with a personal God who not only deserves loving friendship but has a right to require of some that they seek nothing else but to let Him do as He wishes with them and allow themselves to be treated by Him as friends. Even so, our contemporaries are ordinarily disconcerted by the insistent sort of assertion which such lives convey. To go a step further, the difference is seen to be still more marked when one considers the simple spontaneity of belief, say, of the primitive and compares it to the way in which the so-called man of today – the " modern man " – approaches religion. For the period we are living in is one where everything is subjected to the mind of man, or rather to man's reason; where reason can go to such lengths as to permit, with the help of highly perfected techniques, of reconsidering not only the whole question of the way the life of man should be organized, but the very concept of human personality, and where the prospect of a new humanity therefore seems to shine in the future. Man must thus be adapted. His intelligence must be fashioned anew and his instincts given new directions; and they do not even stop at asserting that his need of religion is something obsolete, the remains of an

earlier state now outgrown. In short, the fundamental questions of life are all being posed again before our eyes, and in the midst of it all somebody comes along and tells us that Jesus Christ is alive; that Jesus is a living Person, present with us, and that He can be a man's friend, and that friendship with Him can become the purpose of a man's life! More still, that somebody demonstrates what he says by doing just this, and doing it to the maximum, almost to the exclusion of everything else. That somebody, in the case in point, is Charles de Foucauld. What are we to make of it? Must we not admit that Charles de Foucauld places us squarely in front of a supernatural fact? Must we not also see that anyone of us may suddenly find himself called to reckon with the same reality in his own life?

But this you know, and I only wished to point out, before going on, that to take any other line of approach when speaking about Pere de Foucauld is to risk missing what is essential to an understanding of him.

I now come to two other aspects of Brother Charles' spirit and work, consequences, as I say, of this same desire. Whether one considers how his life evolved through its successive stages or whether one reads either of his two rules, one is struck by the importance he gave to poverty. That a Trappist of Akbes, the really miserable monastery in the North of Syria where he had asked to be sent from France because it was the poorest of the Trappist monasteries known to him, should think that he was not yet poor enough, is really little less than amazing. He owned nothing, had nothing, and had taken the solemn vow of poverty. His life in that primitive monastery was a most meagre life of hard work. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a poorer religious life. Yet I think there can be no mistake in saying that one of the chief reasons why he wished to leave was his desire for greater poverty. Obviously, it was not his only reason : the inner urge clearly came from God and was pushing him towards a vocation which was to be considerably more complete; but poverty was nevertheless its dominating element at the time. The proof of this is the rule he meanwhile drafted, entirely centred as it was around the idea of poverty. And what was it that he wanted, exactly? Christ beatified the spirit of poverty and a religious whose heart is poor, whose roots have been torn away from earthly goods, and who lives in obedience to his rule, is surely completely poor. But Jesus said not only,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit",

but also,

"Blessed are the poor"

— the poor themselves. What Charles de Foucauld felt was an inner need to imitate Jesus at Nazareth.

One night — and I quote this little story because it is so revealing — he was sent by his Father Abbot to sit up with the body of a poor man who had just died in the neighbouring Arab village. He had never seen poverty such as he found in that house, and when he got back to the monastery, he set this down in his notebook :

"What a painful difference between these buildings of ours and that poor working-man's hovel! I am not yet satisfied. It is Nazareth I want."

But what, you may wonder, did he mean by "Nazareth"? "Nazareth" meant the poverty of Jesus the Worker, of Jesus the poor Worker living and working in a poor village of Galilee, among those of His race and those of His class. I think that, in addition to having the inner virtue of poverty, certain souls are asked by God to reach an outer state of poverty which will be a witness, or simply a realization of an aspect of the Gospel.

Yes, God was certainly inciting Brother Charles of Jesus to achieve not only a life of poverty but a religious state of poverty which would be something new. Let us look at the rule I mentioned a moment ago, It only amounts to four pages of typing, but it concentrates so entirely on the idea of poverty that it envisages not only all the measures but all the precautions which Pere de Foucauld thought necessary in order that the handful of Little Brothers he had in mind should be certain to keep to a material poverty as low as that of the poorest artisans of Palestine. It is drastic in its demands. In fact, it is over-exacting, lacking in prudence, and therefore unlivable. But it is nevertheless a most moving document because of the idea behind it – a strong idea, an idea born in the very soul of Charles de Foucauld, an idea he was bent upon realizing, and this was that he and his brothers should live like poor workers, live by work alone, and live from day to day.

There was something else still in his idea; for there have always been religious in the Church living by their work. There was something else that was very important, something that was essential in its novelty, something that not only helps to explain Father de Foucauld but was to become one of his disciples' chief rules. Father de Foucauld did not wish simply to be poor; he wished to be treated like the poor in this world.

The day his Father Abbot told him that he thought he ought to begin studying for the priesthood he received a shock which greatly upset him. He had never thought of becoming a priest and the idea of it made him beg his Superior not to start him off in that direction, the reason being, as he said, that he felt so imperative a call to keep to the last place that the dignity of the priesthood would prevent him carrying out the principal side of his vocation. Again, when he left Akbes and started out for Nazareth, he dressed himself to look like the beggars of Palestine. He wanted to be treated like a beggar and when he arrived in Nazareth and the street urchins jeered at him and threw stones at him, he was at the height of delight, because, as he noted in his diary, he had at last found what he so desired : to be poor, and treated like a poor man, in the town where Jesus had lived a poor man. One can hardly fail to see the meaning of this : Father de Foucauld's vocation was not only to be poor, not only to live like a poor man by the work of his hands, but to be poor socially. This, I emphasize, is extremely important. It was so strong in him that he struggled for years against the idea of the priesthood, for fear the dignity of being a priest would bring him respect, and so remove all hope of his being treated like the poor.

Later, after having spent two years at Nazareth, and largely under the influence of the Superior of the Poor Clares, for whom he worked, he, of course, finally gave in and agreed to become a priest. He had then come to see that God was asking him to join the two things, the two vocations, together – that is, to become a priest and remain poor and little. He agreed

the more readily now that he felt more and more distinctly that God was calling on him to found a double religious family, and also to accept a certain form of the apostolate.

The fact of his living, as he was soon to do, in the Sahara Desert no doubt made it comparatively easy for Father de Foucauld to reconcile his priesthood with the social condition of a poor man. Here he could wear a tattered nondescript robe, go about barefoot, travel on foot by the side of his donkey, which the Arabs, who generally mount camels for travelling, consider undignified. His whole manner of living was as close to that of the desert poor as he could make it, and all this made him a poor man socially. However easy it may have been for him under such circumstances, there was nevertheless something essential here, something that must always make its imprint upon us, his Little Brothers, whose task it is to keep his message and achieve his ideal, not alone among the Arabs or the Touareg of the Desert among whom Pere de Foucauld also lived later on, but in all different environments throughout the world. All of us, even the Little Brothers who are priests, must be and remain socially poor. And in order to be so, we must, of course, first become so when we have been born in other surroundings. Nor is the task always an easy one, as you can well imagine. One has to break not only with social habits but also with a certain way of regarding the religious life. Often people are quite unaccustomed to thinking that a religious can be on the same footing as the poor and be treated as such. To understand our Fraternities, one must realize that certain things about our way of living which may at first sight seem strange, are dictated by the necessity of our really belonging to the milieu of the poor, because that is what God asks of us. It is a matter of vocation.

I should perhaps add at this point, though I have already suggested as much, that if this vocation has come, it is doubtless because it was necessary that the poor, the milieu of the poor, should have their religious; that the religious life should be lived among them by men intending to make themselves in every way their brothers. We are all accustomed to the middle and upper classes having religious with their own kind of mentality, culture and social usages, but what of the poor – those who are badly housed, those who struggle painfully just to live, not to mention the millions of underfed in the world – those masses of men particularly beloved of Jesus because they suffer and because they are poor? Is it not normal that these too should have their religious, and that a founder should have desired that his religious should belong to the class of the poor, and should make all the sacrifices that this involved? For everything about their lives must harmonize – their housing, their dress, their food, and above all their hearts and minds.

This brings me to a still deeper motive for this form of poverty, and here again we shall be touching upon a most essential point in the message of Father de Foucauld, which has to do with Christian love. Between love and poverty there are closer connections than is generally realized, and if Father de Foucauld discovered an aspect of the former which is too often lost sight of, it was precisely because he had succeeded in reaching not only self-dispossession but also the degree of poverty which gives a true understanding of the poor. I said a moment ago how astonishing it was that a man with all the qualities that go to make a man of action should have forbidden himself the use of any of the normally efficient means that serve in the apostolate. This was certainly not for want of zeal, for after his years of intimacy with Jesus,

first in the Trappist Order and then during the long retreat at Nazareth, his heart was literally bursting with love for mankind. How extraordinarily great this love was can be seen from the closing chapters of his rule of 1899, where he comments on the tact and delicacy which the Brothers must always put into their charity for all, and for the very poor in particular. It was likewise about this same time that he wrote to his Apostolic Prefect that he was ready to go to the ends of the earth to spread the Gospel, and to live, too, till the Day of Judgment. How, indeed, could he have failed to have such apostolic desires? Is it, in fact, possible to love Jesus profoundly, and be possessed of the love of the poor, without desiring the apostolate, without needing to make Jesus known and help create bonds of intimacy and adoration between Him and one's fellow men?

Was not Charles de Foucauld then to move heaven and earth for the conquest of souls? Was he not to have recourse to any and all human means capable of furthering the progress of the message and carrying it as far afield as possible? One would have thought so. Yet we observe to our surprise that he keeps repeating that it is not his mission to preach, and when we see him go among the Touareg without employing any single one of the means ordinarily associated with the apostolate, we hardly know what to make of it. He goes practically empty-handed, undertakes no works of charity, proffers not a gesture to make himself popular, does nothing whatever, in short, to attract the Touareg by any other means than what he is, what he wishes to be to them himself. One would hardly dignify with the name 'apostolate' his handing out needles to the women, giving a little food now and then to the needy, and small things like that. More still, he says emphatically in his rules that his Little Brothers are not to have any organized works; such as schools or hospitals, and that those who are priests are not to take charge of any parishes or accept any official ministry. One begins to wonder, indeed, just what he means by his Little Brothers being apostles.

I realize that this is one of the things about us which it is least easy to grasp at first sight. When we go to see a Bishop or the head of a mission station to suggest a foundation, we are generally pretty sure beforehand how the conversation is going to turn. We will be asked to run a school or supply priests for a parish, and we are going to have to say that we can do neither of these things. Then will come the question, "Well, what do you do exactly?" and some disappointment and bewilderment will at the same time be apparent; and if the proposal is finally agreed to, as it usually is, it may still not be without some such mental query as this : "They can't do much harm, of course, but I don't quite see yet what help they are going to be." Now, I thoroughly appreciate that a pastor who has trouble in providing his flock with enough shepherds and with proper teachers for those of his sheep who need instruction, should have these problems as his immediate and constant concern. On the other hand, is there not something to be said for thinking about other possible forms of apostolate, say, in respect of those who do not have the faith or, to be more precise, for considering what the essential object of the apostolate, properly speaking, really is?

What, then, is the apostolate? How are you going to define it? Have you exhausted the subject when you have talked about schools, dispensaries, hospitals, orphanages, and even when you have talked about setting up new parishes and bringing the sacraments to greater numbers? I am not questioning the validity of any of these direct means; some of them are certainly

eminently necessary, and in fact essential. But can it rightly be said that without these means there is no apostolate? Nobody, I think, would deny that there is such a thing as a purely interior spiritual apostolate or claim, for example, that a Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus in her convent was not a missionary. It will also be admitted that the Carthusian monk can be a missionary without leaving his cell. But it would often seem to be incomprehensible that religious who renounce the conditions and atmosphere which are especially favourable to deep, regular and prolonged prayer in order to live among and like the poor, should still claim to be leading a life of any apostolic value.

It is perfectly true that we sometimes have trouble in praying : our life is a busy life; the Brothers are often tired at night after their day's work, and visitors drop in and must be properly received, whatever the inconvenience, and time for prayer then has to come out of the Brothers' sleep. So we get questions like this : " What are you actually aiming at? You say you do not occupy yourselves with works; you say you do not have recourse to the customary organized means of apostolate, and yet you have none of the conditions that normally make the contemplative apostolate possible for religious living in monasteries. The Benedictines have the Office, the official prayer of the Church, and thus meet the requirements of a liturgical apostolate. The Carmelites have their particular way. But how exactly do you go about it? " There, indeed, is the crux of it — the point which is most characteristic of the vocation of Brother Charles of Jesus. For it could hardly be considered without significance that Brother Charles of Jesus was in fact in a monastery first. His vocation was therefore other than that of the cloister. It was to live among people as they live, yet without employing the usual means of evangelization or of the apostolate.

Now, what was Our Lord's first commandment to us as regards others? Was it not the commandment of fraternal love? If that is true, then is one not entitled to say that any activity, any manner of being or way of living, indeed any word, that helps to spread fraternal love in the world, that helps to preach fraternal love, that helps people to live by it, is a veritable apostolate, especially if such preaching is done in the name of Jesus, is centred around His Eucharist, and is accomplished for His sake? Well then, the life of the Little Brothers can, I think, be correctly described as a life directed, entirely, with the idea of unity. His last prayer before Gethsemani and Calvary was full of it, and in those long passages in Saint John which portray so extraordinarily what was going on in the inmost part of His soul, one feels an anguish — one might almost say a veritable obsession — about unity. We must, I think, conclude from this that such union among men is a thing of the utmost importance. In the first place, it is the fruit of Love, and the sign that Love has reached perfection; and it may also be said that where there is no unity, or at least no tendency towards unity, there is no real Love, but that where there is deep unity, there is Love. We may likewise deduce from this that unity is difficult to achieve, and that it is difficult precisely because it is the fruit of Love.

Now, what do we observe as we look about us today? In the entire history of the world, there has perhaps never been a time when division was so great, so wide-spread or so constant. Nor am I speaking only of the divisions between classes. You know as well as I do how many more causes of division there are, such as nationalism, which has rarely been so strong, racial

prejudice, which would seem to be worsening in many quarters, and revolt in the majority of colonized countries. That is the way things are, and we all ought to open our eyes and see this reality squarely. Yet the last century was one of the finest periods the Church has seen from the standpoint of the flowering of Christian Charity. Efforts were made in all manner of directions. Men and women in almost incalculable numbers went out – and many gave their lives in the doing of it – to carry the Lord to peoples to whom He was as yet unknown. Can one consider it normal to cull such bitter fruits from such generous sowings?

With these facts in mind, I should like you to meditate with me for a moment on the kind of Charity that Christ wants of us Christians. Instead of attributing all these divisions, all these hatreds, all this disorder to failures in charity on the part of those we have tried to serve, perhaps we should rather look at our consciences and ask ourselves whether we realize to what limits Christ can ask us to go in observing His commandment, whether He has not been expecting of us a sort of increase or superabundance of charity.

It is plain from the Gospel, as I have already reminded you, that there is a closer bond between love and poverty than we may always appreciate. To love is to give – to give something, yes, surely, but also oneself. Now, in order to give a thing, one must be detached from it, free to let it go; one does not really give a thing to which one is still attached. Thus the first degree of poverty, which consists in detaching oneself from the good things of earth and riches, corresponds to the first or humblest degree of love – that of alms-giving, the giving of money. The second degree of poverty is an inner poverty, and leads to a higher degree of love. Here a person will give his time, his thought, his strength; he will even devote his life up to the point of exhaustion, illness, or perhaps death itself. This, needless to say, is a very pure form of charity, and one which is both understood and lived by a large number of people. It is mostly this kind of charity which has sent so many missionaries to distant lands, given birth to such admirable devotion with those who care for the sick and those who teach. But may there not be still another degree of love where love is poor in the sense of being humble – humble and respectful? We may have given our time, our strength, our lives, but have we been attentive enough to giving ourselves? Surely the ultimate purpose of charity is neither just to give things nor simply to give ourselves in the sense of giving, let us say, for lack of a better term, all the "physical" in our lives. Do you not believe that it is to give ourselves as well in true, humble friendship? Nor must we entertain the illusion that friendship of any description – and certainly not the kind I am speaking of – goes automatically with the dispensing of benefits, or even the giving of everything we have. Another kind of giving is needed. We might perhaps call it "love in friendship".

Friendship like this silences all facile criticism; eschews mockery and sarcasm; Should we not ask ourselves whether, in the past, we have not often allowed ourselves unconsciously to be the victims of a prejudice of race or class? It seems to me that we sometimes suffer from a veritable delusion which deforms our vision of others, and prevents us seeing what true charity demands of us.

Why is it so often all but impossible to establish friendly relations, say, between employer and employed? I am afraid there are Christian employers, even generous-minded ones, who have

not realized that this is no imaginary problem and who fail to put themselves in the place of those who work for them. They may judge with kindness, but they judge with condescension. They often have a high sense of their social duties, at least as they see them, and while they are usually ready to do anything they can, it is not always with sufficient respect or veritable esteem for their staff's personality. That is something they sometimes seem unable to arrive at, and grave failures of charity, and even of justice, therefore occur, and attitudes are taken that cause discouragement. For what will be the natural tendency of someone who is dependant? They may have received all the benefits you like, but if they feel an attitude of superiority, will there not be an incurable, even if unconscious, wound? And the wound will fester, and the employer who has done everything he thought he could for his employees, will find himself, to his astonishment, reaping bitterness, and sometimes even hatred, because he has humiliated without realizing it. Then the poor will be criticized for being proud and ungrateful, and the "native people" for revolting.

Ought we not to question ourselves before we draw such conclusions? Are we really entitled to judge ourselves superior? For this, I think, is exactly the point on which the problem rests. Just how are we superior? Is it by our culture; is it by our race; is it by our wealth; is it by our Christianity? Does possession, then, excuse lack of respect or contempt? It is thus far that the Christian must go in being "poor". And, moreover, how could we justify thinking of these riches as belonging to us?

I feel certain that there is a question here which has become extremely serious today. I say extremely serious, because, if one can correct a fault of which one is sufficiently aware, there is no cure for an unconscious one, and this particular fault is precisely an unconscious evil. National pride, racial pride, class pride, cultural pride are all ordinarily unconscious, for one breathes one's own nature in them, as it were. We are our families, we are our countries, we are our races, and it is all but impossible for us to judge them as if from without and in truth — and God will, I believe, be merciful for this kind of fault so long as we remain unaware of our pride and keep our good will. But the world has come to a turning-point in its history where we cannot avoid this query : either Christians are going to comprehend what has happened and change or the Church is going to stop growing; the working classes will move farther and farther away from her, especially in those countries where they are already largely outside, and the Christian communities which have been founded among the different coloured races will totter because the missionary is white and because he has come with the white official and the white business man, and, whether he will or not, is therefore looked upon as one with them. Since these all belong to one race, they are believed to think alike and to have the same reactions. And how could it be otherwise? Can we get away from the fact that what the white man has been lacking in, is humility and a sense of respect for every person, whoever they are, however different from himself?

To get back now to Father de Foucauld, if he wished his Brothers to be called "little" and to be "universal" as he said, it was because he wanted this basic attitude of true charity to be well instilled in them. And this, I think, will help you to see why it is a veritable apostolate — or rather one road of the apostolate — for the Little Brothers of Jesus not to occupy themselves with works. Bringing nothing with them in the way of material or technical benefits, having

little if anything to give away, they are in no position to crush with superiority. If you have seen the film "Monsieur Vincent", you will recall that telling sentence with which Saint Vincent de Paul concludes his instructions to the Sister who is going out for the first time among the poor :

"It is only by feeling your love, that the poor will forgive you for your gifts of bread."

It is not that we are not to give, but our giving must be done with real and profound humility such as can only come with the acquisition of an inner poverty so deep that it enables us to be consciously detached from our own cultural values — yes, and from the very excellence of the race or class to which we belong, and from all other human "superiorities" as well. This is difficult, excessively difficult, I admit. Yet we cannot love like Christ until we do reach this degree of inner poverty and humility.

In each period of history, as the Church goes forward, charity would seem to have a particular way of manifesting itself, corresponding to a particular need of the time. Saint Vincent de Paul, for example, introduced a whole lineage of Congregations and saints caring for the poor, because society at that moment was not yet capable of coping with such problems by itself. Through the centuries, the Church has always been like the leaven of mankind's progress : she alone took charge of education over a long period; she was the instigator of public charity; she inspired the first efforts towards social justice. Now, however, the tendency, at least with non-Catholic States, is to get along without her for all these services the nature of which is not essentially religious : mankind is more capable of organizing itself socially and caring for its sick, and when it comes to teaching its children, prefers too often to do so without the Church's assistance. On the other hand, whole countries are closing their doors to missionary works. What, then, in a context like this, is to be the privileged sign of divinely-inspired charity? The greatest need would appear to be for doing away with the divisions among all people and combatting hatred in every possible quarter. What is expected of the Church today may therefore well be a renewal, a rebirth of the friendship which ought to exist throughout mankind.

But if this is what our world of today is waiting for, are we in fact capable of meeting its expectation? If, without faith in God, as those who merely follow their reason — who are atheists — are to the fore in opening up new ways, could they not also be ahead in meeting this challenge of love and respect? It is no mere accident that the most effective initiatives against racial prejudice and certain abuses of colonialism have come, in certain countries, not from Christians but from lay organizations, some of which are even Communist. This is a fact, and a grave one. It is furthermore sufficiently widespread to demand a serious effort on the part of Christians practically everywhere. Nor is it simply an effort of good will that is required, for this exists, and countless men and women have literally killed themselves at tasks of charity without realizing either that they were the bearers of instinctive prejudices or that these prejudices caused suffering because they crushed and humiliated. You have to get down into the heart of the poor, into the heart of those whose culture is not esteemed to realize what painful complexes they suffer from.

I am sure I need say nothing more now for you to appreciate why Father de Foucauld laid down those material conditions which should facilitate the achievement of such friendship by

his Little Brothers and Little Sisters. We must be friends with the poor (and I am taking the word "poor" here in its very broadest sense); we must be friends with the poor, and in order to be their friends, we must be their equals, not their betters; and Father de Foucauld has seen to it that we shall be in no position to consider ourselves their benefactors, so that we shall have no excuse for giving in to any attitude of superiority, outward or inward. This, of course, does not mean that we must not be ready at all times to do everything possible for those whose friends we wish to be. But, at the same time, it is, I believe, a true apostolate to place oneself voluntarily in such a condition of poverty as to become capable of demonstrating in point of fact that real and deep friendship, friendship on a footing of equality, is possible with the poorest of the poor.

I stress this word "friendship". We well know – and Saint Thomas Aquinas also says so – that friendship either presupposes equality or brings it about. We forget this too easily. Charity must therefore tend to turn into friendship – and I wonder if we always realise as well as we should that by judging ourselves superior we inflict grave injury upon Our Lord's precept. Infractions like this involve no personal guilt, of course, when we do not know what we are doing; they are none the less serious for Christ's reign on earth by the effect they make upon others. If you have ever looked at the Gospels with the idea of analyzing the way Jesus behaved with people – He who, more than anyone who has ever lived, would have been entitled to consider Himself superior, even just humanly speaking, on account of His human perfection - you have certainly remarked how humble He always was. There was never even a suggestion of condescension. He had friends among the humblest. And with what respect He treated the woman taken in adultery! Only once do we find a scene where, at first sight, He would seem to have used harshness – the scene where the woman of Cana comes and begs Him to cure her child, the woman who speaks of the dogs feeding on the crumbs that fall from their master's table. His first answer appears to betray something of the superiority of the Israelite, but one quickly realises that what Jesus is really aiming to do is to draw out, for the sake of those who are looking on, the greatness of the woman's faith. At the end, when He hung upon the Cross, harried though He was by all the thoughts that can trouble a dying man, entitled though He now would have been to ignore what was going on around Him, since He bore the lot of all mankind within Him and the Redemption was only to be complete with His death, He still found the way to pay attention to the thief they had crucified with Him. And how simple, how friendly His answer! What a friend He instantly made Himself! The day we shall dare to treat like a friend a criminal – someone about to be executed, someone rejected by society, someone sneered and scoffed at by others – the day we shall be capable of respecting such a man as much as we would any other, and of considering him entitled to our friendship, that day we shall have begun to understand the Lord's precept.

And there you have the very simple explanation of the paradox of the apostolic impulse behind these Fraternities of ours to which Brother Charles of Jesus wished to give a missionary character, while at the same time forbidding them to resort to any other means of action than those which, in themselves, constitute direct witness of revealed Truth and the Christian Faith, His instructions to them may be summed up thus :

"Be little; be brothers to all people, and love them."

Are we then claiming too much when we say that this is an authentic form of the apostolate, difficult as it may be to make it fit with the usual definitions, for it lends itself neither to expression in terms of quantity nor to measurement by statistics?

Some way back, I referred to the kind of questions that are often put to us as to what we do, before we are accepted. I could have added that these are frequently followed by this one : "What results have you to show for your apostolate?" To this my answer can only be : "I have no idea." And how, indeed, are the results of any apostolate to be really reduced to figures? You can tell how often the sacraments have been given over a certain period of time – so many communions, so many confessions, so many baptisms, so many marriages. But you cannot measure the Christian faith of your Christians. There can be more true faith in a parish where the sacraments are distributed less frequently than in some parishes where the figures are high. I doubt whether it would ever have occurred to Jesus to apply a measuring rod to the transmission of His kingdom on earth.

"My kingdom is not of this world."

He is in our midst, and we do not know just where or how, or where He is not. And even if we work all our lives without any apparent results, even if God allows the best and purest of our undertakings to fail in appearance as completely as He did with Father de Foucauld, we can draw no conclusions. For the life of an apostle to be consistent and retain its unity, it must rest upon profound friendship with the Person of Jesus, and the apostle must therefore not be content with giving himself through what he achieves either in the way of charity or of justice.

What is essential in the vocation of our Fraternities is the bond between love and poverty which are very close. It was the particular form of poverty – social poverty – which Charles de Foucauld wanted both for himself and for his Little Brothers that gave him the possibility of being a friend to the poor and so manifesting, in the name of Jesus, love of a kind of which there can be no doubt, a love which is a road to knowing the Christ-God.

Article is drawn from here: <http://www.jesus Caritas.info/jcd/fr/4709/apostolate-friendship>