

A Christian Presence in a Muslim Home:  
*The Interfaith Etiquette of Charles de Foucauld*

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Introduction

- Be a good house guest.
- “To understand the other, one does not need to annex him but to become his guest.”  
Louis Massignon

Biography: A familiar pattern: privileged early life; profligacy; “conversion”/return; saintliness

- 1858 Born, orphaned six years later, raised by grandparents
- Educated: Lycée in Nancy; Jesuits in Paris; Saint-Cyr & Saumur (military academies)
- 1879 Commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, to North Africa; resigned commission 1882
- 1883–84 exploration in Morocco and subsequent accolades
- 1885–86 return to Paris and to the Roman Catholic Church (Fr. Henri Huvelin); Gold medal from French Geographical Society for *Reconnaissance au Maroc*
- 1890–97 Trappist monk, France and Syria ('96 theology in Rome)
- 1897 to the Holy Land and the Poor Clares of Nazareth
- 1901–1916 North Africa (1901 ordained priest)

Return to the Faith

- Highly influenced by experiences of Islam which “acted as a catalyst to bring his unbelief back to Christian doctrine.” Massignon

Attitudes and Limitations

1. A soldier and son of France
  - the duties of colonization
  - military occupation
  - slavery
2. A lover of God and son of Christ
  - dedication to living “the hidden life of Nazareth”
3. Missionary method
  - “universal brotherhood”
  - “...you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar...” (33, 21)
4. Like John the Baptist, a “preparer” or forerunner
  - “...not Evangelization ... preparatory work for Evangelization, the establishment of confidence, of friendship...” CdF
  - To love is not to convert, but first of all to listen.

Practical Implications

1. Christians in non-Christian cultures are guests in another’s home.
2. “Universal brother” defines Foucauld’s “method:” living as siblings.
3. Christians should see with “baptized eyes.” “See Jesus in all people.” CdF
4. An example of inclusivity. “We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit.” (29, 46)

## For Further Exploration

(A brief, very selective, annotated bibliography)

### Biographies

Antier, Jean-Jacques. *Charles de Foucauld*. Trans. Julia Shierk Smith. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999.

Accessible and very helpful scholarly biography.

Bazin, René. *Charles de Foucauld: Hermit and Explorer*. London: Burnes, Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1923; reprint, Forgotten Books, 2018.

Translation of the influential French original.

Thurston, Bonnie. *Hidden in God: Discovering the Desert Vision of Charles de Foucauld*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 2016.

Designed for prayer as well as study.

Woolfitt, William. *Charles of the Desert: A Life in Verse*. Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2016.

A creative and moving life.

Wright, Cathy, LSJ. *St. Charles de Foucauld: His Life and Spirituality*. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2022.

Second edition of an earlier work. Full of wonderful photographs.

### Charles de Foucauld, Writings

Charles de Foucauld. *Inner Search: Letters (1889–1916)*. Trans. Barbara Lucas. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 1979.

Ellsburg, Robert, ed. *Charles de Foucauld*. Modern Spiritual Masters Series. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 1999.

Six, Jean-François, ed. *The Spiritual Autobiography of Charles de Foucauld*. Ijamsville, Md.: The Word Among Us Press, 2003.

### On-Line Resources

For general information: [www.jesus Caritas.info/jcd/](http://www.jesus Caritas.info/jcd/)

Lay Fraternities in the U.S.A.: [www.brothercharles.org](http://www.brothercharles.org)

Diocesan Priest Fraternities in the U.S.A.: [www.jesus Caritas usa.org](http://www.jesus Caritas usa.org)

Little Sisters of Jesus: [www.jesus Caritas.info/jcd/lcj](http://www.jesus Caritas.info/jcd/lcj) and [thejosephhouse.org/the-little-sisters/](http://thejosephhouse.org/the-little-sisters/)