

ALL IS GRACE The last letter of Antoine CHATELARD

All is grace! We are welcomed to CHRISTMAS and the New Year at the same time as Covid 19. Édouard and Paul-François tested positive, Immanuel and I negative, last Monday night after the visit of a niece of Edouard's who came from Paris for 16 and 17 December. That's the reason why we are organising ourselves for a new situation without knowing what the day holds.

Thank you for your news and your best wishes. Almost all arrived after a long silence that is explained by the events of this special year, which has challenged usual habits and relationships. It is also a new way to share our story over years that have left traces with the celebrations of historical characters, who had not marked my story as I was far from France and without the possibilities of information that we have now.

To those who may have questions about my activities and my new book, I must tell them that, for obvious commercial reasons, it will not be published until the date of canonization is announced. It has been at the publishers for more than a year and will only speak about Charles de Foucauld in Tamanrasset, beginning with the story at the Asekrem, where he was only a few months in 1911, and which still poses questions about his true motivations. It will be followed by a chapter on his activities the following year (1912) in Tamanrasset typical of his conception of world affairs. Chapter 3 will be limited to his only pre-planned travels with a young Tuareg in Marseille in 1913, never before mentioned, not even in the most recent books. Finally, the last chapter, on January 12, 1913 in Tamanrasset will allow us to see him live out his various actions as we try to follow his revised and amended timetable.

This will be just an introduction to other topics that merit clarification and which can still reveal to us a form of holiness that is not always clear. I have just learned that Pope Francis, was not content to conclude his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, speaking about Charles, but has just offered a biography of this future saint to the members of the Roman Curia, without citing what book this is from. Concluding "*Fratelli tutti*" by mentioning our brother Charles, has encouraged me to continue my work to show in greater detail what his fraternal life was like with the men and women he loved, not only for a time, for a single day, but every day, during the last years of his life. Hundreds of people came to what he called "communion" when he was still dreaming of gathering disciples, but where he was always alone.

In the early years he only wrote down the names of the recipients of his alms and small gifts, on loose sheets that are not found in the edition of his notebooks. It is important because it lets us know that he knew hundreds of people, from the early years. On the other hand, during his last three years, he wrote down their names every day and we can tell that several came hundreds of times. These figures are important to understand the importance of these visits he received, and the subsequent contacts they had among themselves.

The one who in the early years did not go out further than a hundred meters, no longer hesitates to go miles to those who are sick, to visit his new house or see his garden, while busy with his linguistic work, his times of prayer and a very copious correspondence. I wish to show that he no longer does anything for their conversion, even if he often speaks about it, but he feels the duty of working for their salvation as his own, loving them as they are and as Jesus loves them. So, he expresses his concern for the salvation of all in the daily lists of his notebooks, in his rare personal writings or in his abundant letters.

So, I am learning to rely on these people, surprised to discover that many were still alive when I arrived in Tamanrasset and the Asekrem in 1955 and even much later.

Charles still has certainly something to say to our Church and to the world, even if it is not new. The official and universal recognition of his holiness will be a good support for all those who refer to him throughout the world, and especially among bishops, priests and lay people, religious both men and women who were inspired by him and who have died, after having played their part in the world. Especially, it will be a challenge to young people, those not interested in this testimony of another century.

Thanks to Pope Francis, who could have ended up quoting Francis of Assisi again, and who has spoken to us of Charles, as if granting him an important role for the future of the Church and of the world after the universal pandemic, which is delaying his canonization. We have never spoken as much about our Blessed Charles as recently with the death on his feast day of Bishop Teissier. Algeria's ambassador to France spoke in prophetic language, describing him as a saint and above all as a compatriot. The Canonization will not contribute much to these ceremonies in Lyon and at Notre Dame of Africa. Many would have seen the magazine "En Dialogue" No. 14, about Charles of Foucauld and the Muslims, published just before these events.

I must admit that aging does not improve my chances of mobility, even indoors and despite outdoor physiotherapy sessions. The daily questions take up more time than my work about de Foucauld, and the too distant prospect of seeing my book come out does not encourage me to work, despite questions coming from all over, including Tamanrasset and other parts of Algeria, which oblige me to answer about small things that keep me in touch with his history.

A happy Christmas and a better 2021 to all.

Antoine