

# St. Charles de Foucauld

## An Abridged Biography

### BORN

15 September 1858, in Strasbourg (France), to Édouard de Foucauld de Pontbriand and Élisabeth de Morlet. \*\*curious trivia: St Charles de Foucauld was born in the very house where “La Marseillaise” (then titled “War Anthem for the Rhine Army”) was sung for the first time.

### EARLY YEARS

#### CHILDHOOD — 1858-1874

- 1864: taken in by maternal grandfather
  - series of family deaths: mother, father, grandmother all in 1864: Charles = orphan at age 6

#### AFTER HIGH SCHOOL — 1874-1884

- 1874-1876: Jesuit school in Paris
- 1876: enters Saint-Cyr Military Academy; 1878 – graduates 333<sup>rd</sup> of 386
- 1878: October – enters cavalry school at Saumur
- 1878-1880: period of boredom & debauchery
  - Grandfather de Morlet dies; Charles inherits a fortune & begins spending it lavishly
  - military service: passes off girlfriend as wife; dismissed from army for unbecoming behavior and insubordination
- 1881: first conversion – rejoins military, to help combat Algerian rebels
- 1882: January – resigns army commission; settles in Algiers to prepare exploration of Morocco
  - second conversion – enters into the Sahara, sees holiness in desert
- 1883: June – begins 11-month exploration of (then-closed) Morocco. Disguised as a rabbi, travels with the Jewish explorer Mordecai Abi Serour

#### BECOMING — 1883-1890

- 1884: May – re-enters French territory in Algeria
- 1885: receives gold medal from Société de Géographie de Paris for exploration
- 1886: goes to meet Abbé Henri Huvelin in Église St.-Augustin in Paris
  - third conversion – prays “If you exist, make yourself known to me”
  - begins tutoring process with Abbe Huvelin (cousin Marie de Bondy’s confessor)
- 1888: Morocco travel memoir published: *Reconnaissance au Maroc, 1883-1884*
- 1890: takes holy orders with Trappists of Notre-Dame des Neiges in Ardèche (France)

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“FATHER, I ABANDON MYSELF INTO YOUR HANDS; DO WITH ME WHAT YOU WILL  
INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMEND MY SOUL ... FOR I LOVE YOU, LORD”

## BECOMING (2) — 1891-1901

1891: transferred to Akbès in Syria

1897: discerns out of Trappist order; travels to Nazareth, works with Poor Clares

1901: June — ordained a priest; returns to Algeria; begins ministry in Beni-Abbès

- begins to elaborate plan for establishing “fraternity”; declares desire to be “universal brother” to all peoples

## DESERT VOCATION — 1902-1916

1902: speaks out against local bishops who refuse to condemn slavery

1905: travels to Tamanghasset with Col. Laperrine; establishes hermitage among Tuareg people (ethnic Amazigh tribe, nomadic/pastoral people)

1906-1916: scientific (linguistic/ethnographic) work among Tuareg: translates Gospels into Tamacheq; collects oral literature tradition & transcribes/translates poetry and songs; creates French-Tamacheq dictionary; lives vocation as Universal Brother

1916: 1 December — Brother Charles dies amidst raid by Senoussi faction

## POST-MORTEM

1917: French envoys journey to Tamanghasset, discover Brother Charles’ body incorrupt where Senoussiya had thrown it

- procession from Tamanghasset to El Golea with hermitage monstrance, St Charles de Foucauld’s consecrated Host still inside.

1925: dedication of memorial plaque to Foucauld in Casablanca

1927: Beatification process begins

2001: April — Pope John-Paul II declares Charles de Foucauld Venerable

2005: November — Pope Benedict XVI declares Charles de Foucauld Blessed

2020: Pope Francis includes Charles de Foucauld in encyclical Fratelli Tutti

2022: 15 May — Pope Francis celebrates St Charles de Foucauld’s canonization at St. Peter’s Basilica, Rome