



Allocutio



PRAESENTATA CURIA

Allocutio August 2016

The Blessed Charles de Foucauld and Frank Duff (II)

I mentioned Charles de Foucauld last month. Perhaps you would indulge me one more time since I have made a discovery in the last month which again shows the similarity between Frank Duff and Charles de Foucauld.

In 1908 Charles de Foucauld wrote this: “Our Algeria, we are not doing anything to help the natives. Civil authorities are only after their own interests. The military only do a minimum in administrating them. The clergy doesn’t have any interest in the natives. It is as if they didn’t exist, except for the White Fathers. And they, even though they were founded for Arabs in Northern Nigeria, find the work unrewarding and are now putting their energy into work in sub-saharan Africa. They’ve only left a small number here whose influence is nil. So that we have here more than 3 million Muslims for over 70 years and we have almost done nothing for their moral progress. A million europeans live here in Algeria but are totally separate. They don’t penetrate into their setting and are totally ignorant about anything that concerns them. No intimate contact, looking at them like strangers and most of the time like enemies. And that spirit of fraternity that no one denies points to duties that are quite different: to see in these people backward brothers whom we must educate and whose spirit and character we must elevate as high as possible ...”.

Charles de Foucauld was concerned about the lack of real contact and engagement with these people.

Fast forward just over 50 years and Frank Duff writes the following to a legion envoy in North Africa concerning the withdrawal of France from Africa (I have slightly edited it): “You speak of the exodus now taking place. It is wonderful to feel like a prophet! Some day or other the French would have to go. And then the great problem would be: would they leave a Catholicism rooted in the native soil? Obviously it was imperative that such would be achieved. A desperate attempt should be made to make use of the time which remained. But no! It was impossible to waken up people. They would not see the writing on

the wall. They were just going to walk along in their ancient groove. It would be dangerous to approach them. When you asked that long ago the answer given to you was that what had happened to the Franciscans hundreds of years ago would be repeated: people who sought to be evangelised would be expelled. But now they are being expelled by circumstances without having earned it in a religious way. Of all the deliberate cases of abstaining from apostleship North Africa presents the authentic one.”

It again shows what is most important in the apostolate: contact. A real contact with real people in their real situation which brings them friendship and concern but also an eye for their well-being. And that well-being is above all spiritual.

Charles de Foucauld made contact as I said last month bringing Christ in his being if not in words. But let me end with the Handbook: “Sternness must be banished from the legionaries mission. Qualities essential to success and above all when dealing with the outcast and the sinner are those of sympathy and unvarying gentleness. We persuade ourselves that particular cases are subjects for rebuke or for the cutting word, and we use those words, and later are left regretting. Why cannot we remember that it is from rough usage that the hardness and perversity of which we complain have grown up. The flower that would have opened under the influence of the gentle warmth of softness and compassion closes tightly in the cold air. On the other hand the air of sympathy which the good legionary carries with him, the willingness to listen, the enter wholeheartedly into the case as put before him, are sweetly irresistible, and the most hardened person, completely taken off his balance, yields in five minutes ground that a year of extortion and abuse would have failed to gain.” And perhaps this is worth noting in the current context: “Those difficult type of people are usually trembling on the verge of rage. He who further irritates them causes them to sin and hardens their resistance. He who would help them must lead them in the opposite way. He can only do this by treating them with extreme forbearance and respect”.

Not easy. And that is where Frank sees Our Lady with her gentleness helping us. “For the legionary there is only one way of doing God’s work, the way of gentleness and sweetness. Legionaries who stray outside that realm of Mary lose touch with her on whom their work depends”.

So whether it is someone outside the faith completely, whether it is a person who has turned against his faith or some indifferent person, the strategy is the same: contact, befriend and share the person of Jesus even if only in friendship,

gentleness and good example. If we ask Mary she will help us bring Jesus to others. Amen.