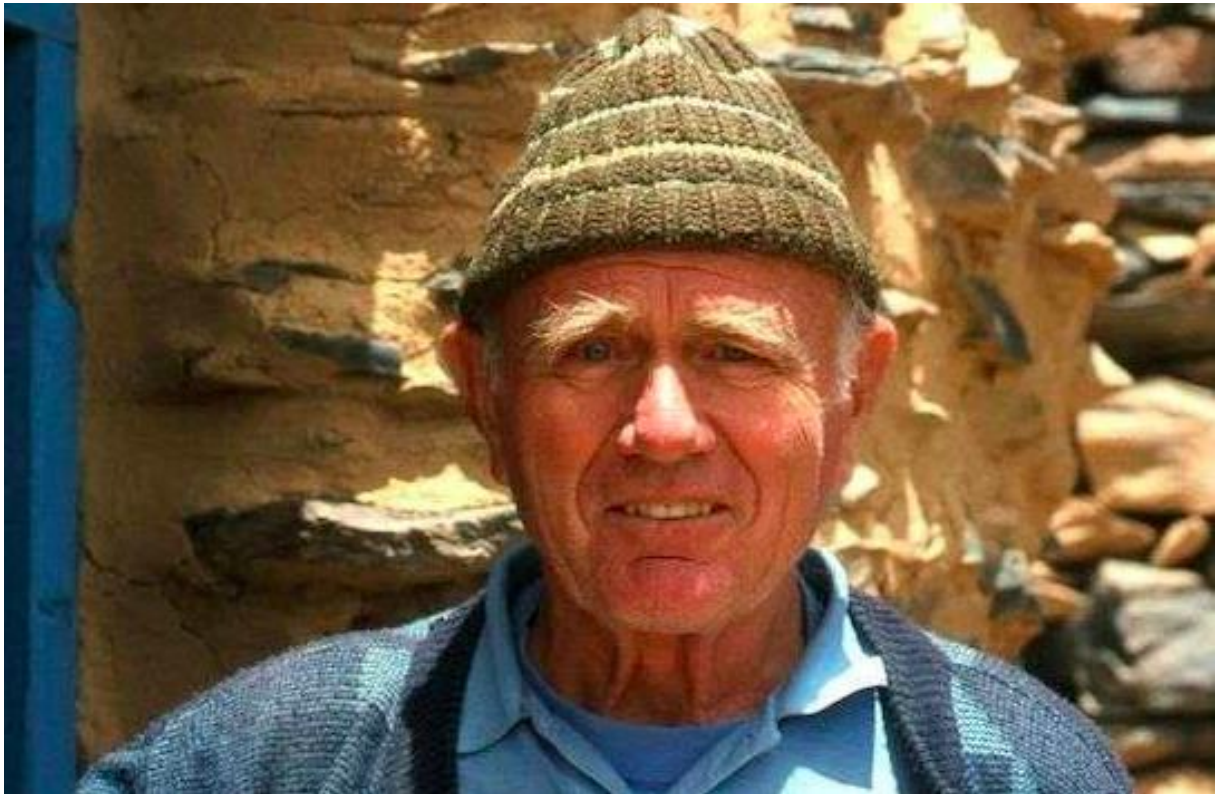


A life in the footsteps of Charles de Foucauld

Father Antoine Chatelard, a member of the Little Brothers of Jesus and biographer of Charles de Foucauld, has died at the age of 90



Father Antoine Chatelard, a French priest who joined the Little Brothers of Jesus in Algeria in 1954 and chronicled the life of the saintly [Charles de Foucauld](#) who inspired the group's founding, has died at age 90.

Chatelard had returned to his native France in 2016 because of health problems and was residing in Marseille when he died.

Those who knew the elderly priest tried to describe the legacy he leaves.

Father Bertrand Gournay, a priest of the Diocese of Gap, recalled that Chatelard's blue eyes would stare at you for a long time before giving an answer to the question asked.

Gournay first met "Brother Antoine" in 2014 when the Gap priest went to do missionary work in Tamanrasset, the town in the Algerian Sahara where Chatelard was living at the time.

For more than 60 years Chatelard continued to investigate the life of de Foucauld, the great spiritual figure the Little Brothers of Jesus who lived among the Tuareg people in Algeria during the first two decades of the 20th century.

De Foucauld, who was beatified in 2005 and whose canonization was approved last May by Pope Francis, would become a major inspiration for Chatelard.

He ended living from 1954-2016 in Algeria where he tried to put into practice the "life of Nazareth", how the Little Brothers describe their charism of doing ordinary work in the midst of the people.

At first Brother Antoine worked as a baker. Then he was employed to record the rainfall in the region.

But no matter what job he held, he was especially devoted to hospitality, welcoming visitors and helping them understand the legacy of de Foucauld.

Taking root through work

Shortly after Chatelard arrived in the region in 1954, he and another Little Brother of Jesus, Jean-Marie Cortade, decided to leave Tamanrasset for the plateau of Assekrem where de Foucauld's dry stone hermitage is located.

It had been abandoned since his death in 1916 and the two brothers went to work restoring it.

They also lived there for some time afterwards. It was an experience that shaped Brother Antoine's lifelong passion for the life and work of the mystic.

Following de Foucauld's example, he learned the language of the Tuareg people through contact with the inhabitants.

He also met many people who had known de Foucauld personally or by second hand. And when he returned to Tamanrasset, Brother Antoine set about writing his first book. It was on the circumstances of Charles de Foucauld's death. The was followed by another, "Le chemin vers Tamanrasset" (the Road to Tamanrasset).

"Antoine was a simple and affable man, a workaholic, but in a calm and meticulous way," said retired Bishop Claude Rault of Laghouat, in the Algerian Sahara.

"Over time, he developed exceptional roots in the region," said the 80-year-old White Father Missionary who led the Algerian Diocese of Laghouat from 2002-2017.

Chatelard worked among the local population, as set out by the rule of the Little Brothers of Jesus. This put him in direct and constant contact with the Tuareg people, which significantly helped his research.

Thanks to his prodigious memory, Brother Antoine became a local reference.

"For the inhabitants of Tamanrasset, he had become a source for the history of places and families," recalled Father Gournay.

Leaving Algeria without ceasing to write

Brother Antoine was heartbroken in 2016 when, primarily due to health problems, he was forced to leave Tamanrasset and return to France.

He went to live in a community of the Little Brothers in Marseille.

"It is always a struggle to leave a region where one has lived for so long," said Bishop Rault, who also had to adapt to his own return to France.

"But I think that his literary work helped him through this change," the bishop said of Chatelard, who continued to work on the life of Charles de Foucauld after moving to Marseille.

In fact, he was completing a third book that is expected to be published soon.

Archbishop Jean-Marc Aveline of Marseilles was scheduled to preside at Antoine Chatelard's funeral on Wednesday at St. Martha's Church in the southern French city.