

Émile Devieux 1912-2015



Emile was born on the 30th May 1912 at Nevers in the Bourgogne region of central France. He studied in the Junior Seminary of Rimont from 1926 to 1933 before entering the Senior Seminary of Autun. In September 1935, he began one year of military service in Tunis. When he returned, he let the Bishop know that he was going to join the White Fathers. As a punishment, he was appointed as a monitor in the Junior Seminary of

Saint-Hugues at Paray-le-Monial. It was here that he discovered the apparitions to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque of the Visitation Sisters and devotion to the Sacred Heart. One day, when the seminarians were going to sing the Mass in the Basilica, his Bishop asked him if he still wanted to leave and on his affirmative reply, the Bishop retorted; “since you are an unruly child, I will be a good father! Leave!” On the 22nd September 1937, Emile began his novitiate in Maison-Carrée under the guidance of Fr. Betz, the legendary novice master. He studied in Thibar for a year before being called up to serve in the 4th Zouaves on the 4th September 1939. After his demobilisation, he took his Missionary Oath in Thibar on the 26th June 1941 and was ordained priest on the 18th April 1942.

He was appointed to Mali but he could not go because of the war. He was sent to the White Father’s Junior Seminary at Saint-Laurent-d’Olt. He taught French, Latin, and Greek there without too much preparation, He stayed until he could leave for Mali. On the

15th May 1945, he boarded an ancient ship, the Marrakech that was full to overflowing. He arrived in Dakar and took a train, which was more like an oven for the 24-hour journey to Bamako. Bishop Paul Molin (+1967) appointed him to Niono Kolongotomo where a Government agency was involved in cultivating rice and cotton. He got down to learning Bambara, with the help of a young teacher. After passing the language exam, he was able to visit the rural outstations. We find him in Falaje in November 1947 where he was again teaching French, Latin and Greek. In 1949, he transferred to Segou where Bro. Lambert van der Weijst (+1981) otherwise known as Bro. Zacharie was well known for his skills as a carpenter, and his brick and lime ovens. Emile returned to Falaje until he went for home leave in 1952. He took part in the Long Retreat at Mours. He was worn out so he was allowed to sleep as much as he wanted during the retreat! He returned to Falaje in May 1953, but had to return home later in the year for the removal of stones from his right kidney. However in the end he had to have the kidney removed and convalesced in Villeurbanne and then in Tassy from May to September 1954.

Emile stayed for some months in Biskra, Algeria before returning

to Mali in August 1955. The new Bishop, Pierre-Louis Leclerc (+1983), appointed him to Kolongotomo. However, he was appointed once more to Falaje in September 1956. In 1958, he began work as chaplain to the novitiate of the African sisters in Kati. It also involved pastoral work in the neighbouring village. He served for some time in the parishes of Ouolossebouyou, Bougouni and Goulalala. He did another Long Retreat in Villa Cavaletti in 1966 but this time there were no prolonged siestas. He returned to Mali but soon had to return to France for treatment for his remaining kidney. In fact, he had to leave Mali, somewhat sadly, in 1967. A chat with a father at Sainte-Foy-lès-Lyon pointed him in the direction of Rwanda where the climate was more clement.

This plan came to fruition in 1969, but the appointment was to the neighbouring Burundi. He took up the post of bursar of the Senior Seminary in Bujumbura. However, he only stayed there for a short time, as Bishop Ntuyahaga needed him to teach French in the Junior Seminary of Kanyosha. Emile demanded that he be allowed to study Kirundi, which meant that he was able to help in the parishes of Giteranyi and Masango. In 1978, the Regional appointed him to PAR, the procure

and guest house at Bujumbura. His great joy was to celebrate daily Mass for the Poor Clare Sisters at Ngarara, an apostolate that deeply touched him.

He returned to France for good in 1979 and worked at the reception desk in rue Friant, Paris. At the end of 1980, he became assistant to the chaplain of the White Sisters in their retirement home in Verrières-le-Buisson. He was also spiritual director to organisations such as la *Vie Montante* and *des Équipes Notre-Dame*. This last group appreciated his help very much and paid him a trip to the Holy Land in 1987 and another to Czestochowa, Poland in 1991. He kept a very happy memory of these trips. At Verrières, he left a memory of a priest who was always available and close to the people of the town where he frequently visited the sick.

In January 1997, a small stroke affected his speech while saying Mass. Prompt and appropriate treatment meant that he suffered no lasting effects. Nevertheless, in November 1997, he retired to Tassy where he was to pass the last 18 years of his life. Right up to the eve of his 100th birthday, he kept his passion for photography that he inherited from his father. He took photos of

life in the Malian and Burundian villages that he visited. He liked to record the daily work of the people. Looking back over his long life, he said that he saw how the Lord had linked and planned his life. He was the docile instrument in His hands, full of love for Him and for those to whom he had been sent. In a brochure that was illustrated by his photos, he put together some spiritual texts: “when one arrives at the end of one’s life (and that is my case) one thinks about meeting God. He will call us to Him and one thinks of judgement...the Judgement of God! It has nothing to do with the judgement of men!...That moment will be like a purifying fire which will burn away all that prevents us from seeing God face to face. It will allow us to be invaded by His love, to be united with Him for an eternity of happiness. Do not be afraid! His infinite love will envelop us! Then for eternity, it is He, my God, in Jesus who will be my treasure, my all, my life! For all time! Thank you my God!”

Emile died on the 10th June 2015 at our house in Tassy, France. He was 103 years old.

Armand Duval

