



## Jacques Roly (1913-2015)



**J**acques was born in Limoges, France on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1913 into a very happy family. His parents were nicknamed “the young lovers!” Mr. Roly was a convinced Christian and helped his wife to become one. He was an artist!| Mr Roly had founded a shoe factory in Limoges, but legal problems which lasted all his life, forced him to move to Toulouse where he became a manager of another shoe factory. He was a hard worker and at the age of 75 years became a chartered ac-

countant in Villeneuve-sur-Lot. Of the three children, the eldest Jean occupied important posts in the French colonies. He worked in Indochina where he just managed to escape the Japanese in 1945. He also worked in Madagascar and in Port-aux-Français on Kerguelen Island in the south Indian Ocean, which was a French scientific and technical station. The youngest child Marie-Therese was a nurse and a qualified social worker. She devoted most of her professional life in the service of immigrants, especially women from the Maghreb. Both lived a life of deep faith.

Jacques worked at various jobs after his secondary school studies at the College Montalembert de Limoges. He felt called to the missionary life and the Director of the College warmly recommended the Missionaries of Africa. He studied Philosophy in Kerlois from 1931 to 1933. He did his novitiate (1933-1934) under the watchful eye of Fr. Paul Betz (+1955) and proceeded to Thibar for theological studies. He

took his Missionary Oath before Fr. Paul Voillard (+1946) then Superior General on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 1938. He was ordained priest in Carthage on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1939. The financial problems of his parents affected him deeply and while he tried to accept the situation in a supernatural spirit, it did depress him from time to time. As he was kind, dedicated, always trying to please, doing his best, being a discreet, obliging and conscientious confrere whom one could trust completely, he was admitted to the Oath and priesthood without problems. However, as he did not enjoy great health and suffered from problems with his liver, his superiors thought that North Africa or the areas of the Great Lakes would be best for him.

In the end, Jacques was appointed to Mengallet in Kabylia. He was conscripted into the army in Tunis in September 1939. He arrived in Tizi-Ouzou in 1942 and got down to learning the Kabyle language. He was diligent in visiting local families. He was called up again for military service in November 1942 and he became chaplain to a youth camp run by the French government in Boulhaut in Morocco. In February 1943, he entered the war, serving as a military chaplain in Moroc-

co. He was appointed to the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division in 1944 and he took part in the campaigns in France, Germany and Austria. He was demobbed on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1945 and returned to Tizi-Ouzou six days later. The following 1st November we find him in Tague-mount-Azouz also in the Kabylia region.

In 1945, Fr. Georges Letellier (+1969) had founded A.MA.NA (Assistance morale aux Nord-Africains) in Paris. Jacques was appointed there in November 1946. He joined up with Fr. Jacques Ghys (+1991) and, for a time, Fr. Joseph Cuoq (+1986). They decided to keep the word 'Amana' as the word in Arabic meant 'precious trust', a word that described their work very well. They first started in rue Friant but from February 1951 onwards, the Amana community lived in rue du Printemps. This facilitated their meetings with the immigrants from the Maghreb. The team worked in various areas especially night classes for immigrants and meetings throughout France with other associations involved in the same work such as the work done by Frs. Jacques Loew in Marseille and Joseph Folliet in Lyon. With the latter, they were conscientious in organising the

annual 'Social Weeks.' In February 1954, Fr. Roly did the Long Retreat at Mours.

Jacques knew enough Kabylie to get by but his superiors advised him to learn Arabic and to study Islam. He learnt enough to understand and help people in both Kabylie and Arabic. He worked mainly in administration and bookkeeping. He was also the delegate to the Marriage Tribunal of the Archdiocese for marriages between Muslims and Catholics something that was a great preoccupation for the bishops of the Paris region. Jacques knew that he did his best even if he was prone to fits of anxiety. One day he went to the Bishop's house to ask for some advice only to be told, "but it is you who are the specialist." In all, he dealt with more than 700 marriage cases in his time in rue de Printemps. Fr. Jacques Ghys, his great friend, was a great support to him. They knew one another from their student days and served in the army together. They were able to work closely with one another sharing the joys and sorrows of the work. Fr. Roly's one big regret was not to have been invited to give the homily at Fr. Ghys' funeral in June 1991.

In 1985, Jacques was appointed to the Provincial House in rue Verlomme, Paris as a receptionist.

In 1995, he officially retired and liked to wander around Paris and sometimes go farther afield to visit some people that he knew from the Maghreb. He arrived in Billère in 2005 where he passed the last 10 years of his life. He died on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2015. He was nearly 102 years old; quite an achievement for a man whose formators thought was not very healthy. In fact, in that long period, he had only one operation, in 2008 in a hospital in Pau. He was buried on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2015 after Mass celebrated in the chapel in Billère. He had passed 77 years of missionary life in Algeria and in France.

He summed up his missionary ideal in the following words, "never forget to make Christ known and loved, even doing it in a very discrete way, and always be available." His favourite saints were Paul, the great missionary, John of the Cross, the two Theresa's of Avila and Lisieux, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity and St. Bernadette of Lourdes. In summing up his life, he pointed out that a Muslim had composed the prayers he liked most, that of 'uselessness' and 'teach us to love.'

Armand Duval