

Jean Lhomme

1924 - 2015



Jean was born in Paris on the 29th October 1924. His father was Chief accountant and his mother a cashier in a large department store. She gave up her job when the children began to arrive. Jean saw little of Paris as the family moved to a new apartment in Meudon where he began primary school. In 1931, the family, which by now counted two boys and one girl, moved to Drancy. He finished his primary schooling and in 1935, he joined the Junior Seminary of Paris in Conflent. He met three future White Fathers among the students and they all decided to join the Society

Jean was in Thibar, Tunisia during World War II from 1941 to 1943. He was called up for military service and he took part in the landings in Provence in the south of France. He went with the army all the way to Germany. As soon as he was demobilised, he returned to Thibar.

Jean did his novitiate in Carthage from 1946 to 1947. He studied Theology in Thibar and Carthage. His superiors said of him, "His intelligence is more of the matter-of fact kind than speculative. He absorbs information easily. He has a sound and sharp judgement, very lively, prudent, and thoughtful. He is endowed with common sense. Sometimes he shows a caustic sense of humour, which is not a problem when one knows him. In community, he is good-humoured and cheerful and the confreres like him. He is an excellent student and all his qualities suggest he is more suited to an active ministry." He took his Missionary Oath in Thibar on the 27th June 1950 and he was ordained priest in Carthage on the 24th March 1951.

After a short holiday with his family, Jean was appointed to the Diocese of Koudougou in Upper Volta (Burkina Faso). He will spend 21 years there in different posts often

as superior. He began in Koudougou in 1952 as assistant procurator then as curate in the Parish. He then taught in the Junior Seminary of Pabre (1954). He transferred to the Junior Seminary of Koudougou and was at the same time Treasurer General of the Diocese in 1960. He was appointed Director of Catholic Education for the Diocese and Superior in Yako in 1961. He did the Long Retreat in Villa Cavalletti at the beginning of 1965 and he was appointed Parish Priest of Temnaore the same year. Various appointments followed, always as superior, to Koudougou (1966), Temnaore (1967), Yako (1972). According to the Bishop, he had the art of clarifying and simplifying complex situations in the parish. His Provincial found that he worked well in Ministry, confessions, safaris, and conferences to teachers. The only problem, he seldom told the teachers all that the Bishop had pointed out. However, it was as a teacher in the Junior Seminary that he was most at ease. He liked a regular lifestyle with the work mapped out in advance. Moreover, he understood the students and could push them to work. He was open with them, liked to joke with them without losing his authority. His relationships with the local clergy were excellent.

He returned to France on home leave in 1973. He did a renewal course in l'Arbresle in rural France as many confrères did at that time.

He unreservedly thanked his superiors in these words. "The course in l'Arbresle is coming to an end. Allow me to express a big thank you to the Province of France for having offered me such an experience." He was then appointed as superior in rue Friant in 1975. He wrote, "As I have never lived in the Province, I have no prejudices as to how a good White Father should live. I hope that the acclimatisation will not be too difficult and that I will not regret at all my distance from the Diocese of Koudougou." He stayed in Rue Friant until 1979, when he was asked to take the place of Fr. Bollinger in the service of CAVIMAC (Health and Social Security) in the Provincial House on rue Roger Verlomme. He was expected to stay for 10 years, he stayed for 22. Jean Claude Ceillier who knew him well testifies; "I lived for many years in community with Fr. Jean Lhomme in rue Verlomme. I would just like to say that I have a great memory of this confrere. At that time, Jean managed the medical files of all the confreres in the Province. He carried out this work for many years with a regularity, patience, and seriousness that everybody appreciated. Always in his office, he welcomed visitors kindly, corrected patiently and precisely badly filled out papers, incomplete or forgotten files. Jean performed a great service in this domain. This demanding work did not prevent him

from assuring ministry in a Parish particularly in Mitry le Vieux.

By temperament, Jean was ordered and regular. A man of few words but always present in the community for moments of relaxation. He hated wasting time, useless gossip, and badly run meetings. This could in turn make him a nuisance at certain community meetings. However, he never raised his voice; just making his displeasure felt when things began going around in circles. Jean was always available to give a service. You could have confidence in him that things would be done well and without delay. I also believe, even if he was very reserved in this area, that Jean was a man of spiritual devotion, prayer and very attached to his vocation. When the Church was going through a big crisis in the 1970s, a time when he was superior in rue Friant, he suffered a lot, like so many others, at the exaggerations and the constant questioning of Mission and our missionary vocation. However, he remained faithful in his services to the confreres, and so to the Mission. His life was a witness to a discrete but genuine faithfulness.”

Jean continued to look after the Social Security affairs of the Province until his eyesight began to fail. He handed over his job but remained in rue Verlomme. He left for our house in Bry-sur-Marne in 2005.

The closeness of his family, who came regularly to visit, greatly eased Jean’s last years in Bry-sur-Marne. The presence of his brother, Bro. Pierre, in the community was also a blessing. Bro. Pierre looked after the little details of his care and remained with him until he drew his last breath. Jean was inclined to isolate himself, as he did not want to be a burden on the community. Nevertheless, he was always faithful to community life and regularly attended all meetings. Visually impaired and watching TV only with difficulty, he was the ‘wise listener’ listening to the radio and all the gossip of his neighbours. However, old age weighed heavily on him and he became more and more dependant. Visits to the hospital were more and more frequent. He died on 13th December 2015 in the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital suffering from serious renal failure. He had looked forward for some time to joining His Father.

Jean’s funeral in the Chapel of Bry was simple and meditative. His loved ones were all present. The liturgy was very moving because of the different testimonies from members of his family, his community, and those who knew him in Africa. There was a sense of peace and calm afterwards as everybody realised deep down that Jean’s life had reached its culmination in a great missionary life close to God, a real White Father.

Clément Forestier