

Jacques Crepin 1931 – 2016



It is not often that someone writes his own obituary. But, why not, particularly as we knew Jacques was not only as a good missionary but also as a man of the theatre. So, let us salute the artist and look at what he wrote in 2012 when he was celebrating 50 years of Missionary Oath (27th June 1961 at Carthage). “On the 16th June 1931, twins were born into the Crepin family in Bierne, near Bergues, France. It was a bit of a shock for the parents who were not expecting twins but who already had three other children all under four years old! The two young brothers of their

mother, née Libbvecht, were also twins named Jacques and Paul. Therefore, it was very natural that the new arrivals would receive the names of their uncles. Since Uncle Jacques was a White Father and Uncle Paul became a Diocesan priest, it was not unsurprising that, freely and spontaneously, their nephews would follow in their tracks.

‘And That, that wants to be a priest’! How many times did we hear this reflection of our mum. ‘That’ referred to two unruly children, not brilliant at school and already passionate about drawing, singing and liturgical ceremonies! It was in November 1942, when they were staying with the Sacred Heart Fathers in Viry-Chatillon (south of Paris) that they fell in love with the theatre. The actors of the Palais de Chaillot fascinated them. And ‘That’ continued to want to become priests.” For Jacques, this meant passing through all the educational establishments that the White Fathers had at the time. He found himself, at home, in St. Laurent d’Olt, Alkirch, Bonnelles, Kerlois, Maison Carée, Thibar and Carthage. He continues, “In all these years, I never mastered any foreign languages. I confess that it was with some hesitation that I agreed to commit myself to the Society of the White Fathers. I was very aware that by taking my Oath, I was also committing

myself, by this fact, to learning a foreign language. I made a mountain out of this difficulty. As Moses before the burning bush, I said to the Lord, 'Send someone else!' I was tempted to join my two brothers who were priests in the Diocese of Lille. I wrote a play about Moses in which I expressed what I was feeling. Happily, Yahweh spoke to me through all those, who knowing me, persuaded me that I was able to climb this molehill that I was making into a mountain. So, I left, not for the Promised Land but for Africa. The greater good took me. After my ordination in Bonnelles on the 29th June 1962 and a course in Mours, I boarded a ship sailing to Africa from Bordeaux in December 1962. I spent Christmas in the hot and humid climate of Abidjan. I travelled up to Upper Volta when I began learning Moré at Guilongou, near Ouagadougou. After that, I joined the Diocese of Ouahigouya."

For the next 33 years, Jacques was in pastoral ministry in Ouahigouya Diocese. He served under three bishops, Mgr. Louis Durrieu (+1965), Mgr. Denis Tapsoaba (+2008) and Mgr. Marius Ouédraogo (+1995). Jacques collaborated a lot with Bishop Marius and his brutal death affected him deeply. Always ready to be of service, Jacques served in practically all the parishes of the Diocese as curate or Parish Priest. His talents as an actor led him to adapting the announcing of the Good News to the local culture through plays and short pieces. When he celebrated 50 years of Missionary Oath, he assessed his life as follows: "Community

life and work as lived in all the parishes was something very concrete. It was thanks to this mutual aid that the Christians of the Diocese were able, during a whole year, to become aware of the African family values. Then they were able to compare them with Christian family values. Finally, after a pilgrimage of more than one hundred kilometres over a number of stages (they will be followed by many others) they were able to celebrate these values in their own language. My gifts as a designer and producer were joined with local composers, singers and dancers and for over three hours, thousand of Christians and catechumens were able to praise the Lord. Following this celebration, we decided to compose a new catechism that followed the same journey: God has spoken to our ancestors; Jesus came to bring to perfection our ancestral faith. It was a marvellous occasion for me to engage in fraternal work with the first diocesan priests and a great way to deepen my knowledge of the customs and language of the people." In fact, Jacques' talent as a theatre artist became known outside the Diocese. He continues, "My theatrical activities helped many students and seminarians to reflect on the problems of the world and their own problems with the help of the plays of Corneille, Racine and Molière and some of the fables of La Fontaine. Our show on the Uganda Martyrs which we rehearsed for nearly a full year with the students of the Catechist's school of Baam was put on 10 or more times in the country. I added my own plays about

Moses, the Annunciation, and the Gospel of John.”

This prolonged presence in Burkina Faso was interrupted a few times to do mission promotion in France, some renewal and the Session/Retreat in Jerusalem (1990). However, in 1995, Jacques began another long phase of his missionary life. Health problems forced to leave Africa and return to France. He did a sabbatical year in Toulouse and got interested in the life of the Church in France. Knowing that the hand over was going well in Ouahigouya, he opted for a commitment to the Mission in France. He began at Mours where he served as Parish Priest and then curate in L' Isle Adam in the Val d'Oise. During these 20 years in the sector, his presence did not go unnoticed. He was an actor (he enjoyed relations with the famous *Comédie Française*). He was A SEEKER for God and his fellow human beings. He flaunted it somewhat; some enjoyed it, others were shocked. In 2013, his health began to get worse. There were frequent stays in hospital but Jacques remained true to himself in the Mours community and in the Parish. One morning, he serenely received the Sacrament of the Sick with three other tired confreres during a community Mass. Immediately after Christmas 2015, Jacques went into hospital for a planned operation. One felt that he was uneasy. Over time, his health had continued to deteriorate and he seemed to sense that things were serious and the time had come to pass over to the other side. One of his last words expressed his hope, “I

am going away to the Father that I love and towards Jesus.” He died on the 11th February 2016 in Ermont Hospital north of Paris.

At his funeral Mass, his twin brother, Paul, insisted on this aspect of Jacques the Seeker: “following St. Paul and Jesus himself, he was a seeker of the truth about God and about mankind. If one needs to be convinced of this, one has only to open the books in his library. How many words and phrases are underlined and even highlighted in colour as he tried to deepen his understanding of what it was all about? All those who listened to his sermons or who met him either at meetings or individually knew how he helped them to get to know the Lord better and in the process get to know themselves better.”

It did not seem at all incongruous, that news of his death and an invitation to the funeral, complete with a big photo, appeared on a large advertisement hoarding near the station of Nointel-Mours. On the 16th February, the Parish church of L'Isle Adam was full, to wish “A Dieu” to Jacques. Three families were united in their grief, the many members of the Crepin family coming from the North, his White Father family, and the Parish family. It was a ceremony full of hope to say ‘thank you’ for his life and its memories. To honour the theatrical dimension of his life, a copy of his latest play “Luke, the beloved physician” was placed on the coffin beside the stole and the White Father rosary beads.

Jean Chauvineau