



ARCHBISHOP MARCEL LEFEBVRE

A Biography of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre

by Father Ramón Anglés

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Marcel Lefebvre was born in Tourcoing, France, November 29, 1905 from a family which gave almost fifty of its members to the Church since 1738, amongst them a cardinal, a few bishops and many priests and religious. **After the baptism of her newborn child, Mrs. Lefebvre embraced him and said: "This one will have a great role in Rome, close to the Holy Father."** Of her eight children, two became missionary Priests, three girls entered in different religious congregations and the other three founded large Catholic families.

Marcel served 5:30 AM Mass every day and was an active member of the Saint Vincent



Society, dedicated to the care of the sick. The family atmosphere and his good teachers at the Sacred Heart school prepared him favourably for the priestly vocation.

After his preparatory studies he entered the French Seminary in Rome, and received his doctorates in Philosophy (1925) and Theology (1929) from the Gregorian Pontifical University. Ordained Priest September 21, 1929, he was sent to assist the Parish Priest in the Marais-de-Lomme, and industrial

suburb of Lille, France.



The letters of his brother Rene, already in Africa, were instrumental for his decision of entering the novitiate of the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1931. After his first vows he started his great missionary adventure in the ship “Foucauld”, destination Gabon, in October 1932.

Teacher of Dogma and Holy Scripture in the Seminary of Libreville, Rector from 1934, he managed to be at the same time teacher, bursar, printer, plumber, electrician, driver... maybe having already in mind his Society’s Priests! He founded there an educational system which permits the Seminary to count today amongst his alumni three bishops and two chiefs of state.

His mother died in 1938, and his father in 1944, after one year of sufferings and privations



in the nazi concentration camp of Sonnenburg.

The Provincial of France called back Fr. Lefebvre to direct the Novitiate of his congregation in Mortain, and on the 18th of September, 1947, he was consecrated bishop in his hometown by Cardinal Lienart, Bishop Fauret —his former superior at Libreville— and Bishop Ancel. The official journal of the Vatican, “L’Osservatore Romano” (French edition, July 1976) recalls that “in 1947, a young missionary bishop, Mgr. Lefebvre, gave a new life to the work of the Church with the opening of new centers of Catholicism... his creative work left in Africa a profound mark.”

Archbishop Lefebvre in Africa as first archbishop of Dakar and Apostolic Delegate of Pope Pius XII for all French-speaking Africa, created four Episcopal Conferences, twenty-one new dioceses and apostolic prefectures and opened Seminaries in his extended jurisdiction. He developed the Catholic press in creating modern printing-presses, he organized the Catholic Action in its entirety, he opened hospitals, schools for twelve thousand children and took care of bringing European religious orders to his territory. **The first Carmel of Africa was founded at his request in Sebikotane, and the first Benedictine monastery of the Solesmes congregation was**

opened by him also in Gabon.



His annual visits to Pius XII made possible the decisive action of the Pope in favor of the Missions, and his information and advises were the basis for the magnificent encyclical "Fidei Donum", which reinvigorated the missionary work worldwide.

Dakar was at that time the biggest city of French Africa, with half a million population, of which 90% were Muslims and Animists. The new ideas brought by the soldiers returning from Indochina, the revolutionary mentality imported by students and teachers from France, as well as the hostile proselytism of Protestant sects did not make the task easy for the Archbishop. He tried to build a truly Catholic civilization by his own example, his personal contacts with the clergy and faithful and with his pastoral letters. The latter deserve a special mention; in his writings he treated subjects as religious ignorance, the Catholic family, social and economical problems, Communism, materialism, etc. **After fifteen years at the head of the Archdiocese, he left his charge to one of his spiritual children, now Cardinal Thiandoum, in 1962.**

1962 John XXIII named him Assistant to the Papal Throne and Roman Count, appointing



him to the diocese of Tulle, France. During six months he had the opportunity of witnessing the state of the Church in one of the most pagan regions of France. Practical and objective as usual, when other prelates were having presumptuous dreams about the priests of the 21st century, he took special care of this own clergy, suggesting to his priests to live together in small rural communities to foster their spiritual life. When a young vicar asked to be moved to a big city in order to "have something to do" the new bishop replied: "Say well your Mass and you have already fulfilled the essential of your daily ministry".

In July, 1962, the General Chapter of the Holy Ghost Fathers, the most important missionary Congregation in the Church, elected him as General Superior for twelve years. At the same time the Pope nominated him member of the Preparatory Commission of the Second Vatican Council, to collaborate in the documents which were to be discussed by the conciliar Fathers. **During a meeting of the Central Commission the Archbishop publicly complained about the**

presence in the sub-commissions of non-Catholics and of doubtful individuals as Hans Kung, Ratzinger (in black suit and tie), Rahner, Congar, Schillebeeckx, and company. Cardinal Ottaviani told him that the Pope himself required their presence! Schillebeeckx wrote at that time: "We now express ourselves in a diplomatic manner, but after the Council we shall take from the texts the conclusions which they implied." And indeed they did it, as we know too well!



With Bishops Morcillo (Madrid), Castro Mayer (Campos), de Proenca-Sigaud (Diamantina) and 250 more prelates, Archbishop Lefebvre created a "traditionalist commando" within the Council, the "Coetus Internationalis Patrum", composed by traditional Fathers who tried to stop the over-powerful influence of the rich and popular Modernist wing directed by Cardinal Bea.

Cardinal Bea, former confessor of Pope Pius XII, was nevertheless a decisive instrument of the Judeo-Masonic sect to obtain from the Council the redaction of "Dignitatis Humanae" and "Nostra Aetate." After the election of Paul VI, who clearly supported the liberal wing, it was obvious that the already ambiguous documents were going to be interpreted in the Modernist point of view. Reducing systematically the influence of the traditionalists and opposing any declaration which could "hurt" non-Catholics (as the document against Communism), Paul VI blessed the adulterous union between the liberal conception of man and society with the Catholic doctrine. **And, as you can imagine, an implacable persecution started against the members of the traditional "Coetus."** Cardinal Lefebvre, cousin of the Archbishop and one of the most conspicuous liberals in France, declared: "We shall never forgive Mgr. Lefebvre."

The Holy Ghost Fathers called an extraordinary General Chapter in 1968 to revise the Constitutions in the spirit of the Council. When Archbishop Lefebvre protested before the Congregation of Religious at the sight of the internal revolution in the Chapter, he was cordially invited to take a long vacation, as the General of the Redemptorists did in the same situation. The Archbishop presented his resignation, which was accepted two days later, and established his residence in Rome, as chaplain to a convent.