

Lanarès, Pierre (1912–2004)

JOHN GRAZ

John Graz, Ph.D. (Paris-Sorbonne University, Paris, France), retired in 2015. He began his ministry as a pastor in France and held director positions in the departments of Communication, Youth, and Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, initiating the “Festivals of Religious Freedom.” He was secretary general of the International Religious Liberty Association, organizing four World Congresses, and secretary of the Conference of Secretaries of World Christian Communions. He wrote and coauthored several books.

Pierre Lanarès was a religious liberty champion and the well-known editor of the journal *Conscience et Liberté*. He led the International Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty (AIDLR) as Secretary General (1966-1983) and died February 2, 2004, in Clapiers, France, at age 92.¹

Early Life and Education

Pierre Lanarès was born in August 1912, in Majunga, Madagascar. His father was a senior official of the French government in Madagascar until 1917, when the family went back to France. Pierre passed his baccalaureate at the renowned *Lycee Henri IV* of Paris. Then he studied at the *Ecole nationale de la France d’Outre-Mer*, where the French state trained its elite to serve at the highest positions in its overseas colonies. In 1937, after he graduated with a degree in Law, Lanarès became a Seventh-day Adventist and decided to serve as a minister.

Marriage and Early Ministry

From 1937 to 1938, he studied theology in the Adventist Seminary of the Salève where he met Edith Meyer, from Gland, Switzerland. They married on November 20, 1938, in Dammarie-les-Lys, France. They had four children: Jean Pierre, Danielle, Claire, and Jacques.

In the fall of 1938 Lanarès began his pastoral ministry in France, but he was mobilized by the French army one year later. He was captured by the Germans and then released in 1940. He next served the church in the cities of Tours, Angers, and Marseille until 1951.

From 1951 to 1960, he was the head of the Adventist Seminary of the Saleve, then director of the Education and Radio and TV Departments of the Franco-Belgium Union (1961-1963). During this period Lanarès produced several radio programs on social issues, education, and religion. They were broadcast by the French National Radio “France Culture” from Paris and reached all the French-speaking countries. In 1964 he was called to serve as president of the Indian Ocean Union Mission (1963-1967) with headquarters in Madagascar.

Religious Liberty Work

Expressing a great interest for religious freedom issues and for the activities of Dr. Jean Nussbaum, Lanarès passed his Doctorate in Law at the University of Geneva in 1964. His research focused on the place of religious freedom in the United Nations Conventions and the International Bill of Rights. His work was published as *La liberté religieuse dans les conventions internationales et dans le droit public général*² It became a reference for many religious liberty defenders.

In 1966, at the age of 54, Lanarès was called by the Southern European Division as Ministerial Association, Religious Liberty, and Radio-TV department director. He was the successor of Dr. Jean Nussbaum, the founder of AIDLR. He kept this position until his retirement in 1983. As the new AIDLR Secretary General, he reaffirmed the role of the association: "Our association does not represent a particular church, or a political party. It has given itself the task to gather all spiritual forces to combat intolerance and fanaticism in all its manifestations."³

He succeeded in combining this ministry with the Radio and TV ministry and produced the first Adventist European TV programs in 1968. They were called "*Signes des temps*" and were broadcast on popular French speaking channels: Radio Télévision Luxembourg (RTL) and Television Monte Carlo (TMV) in 1969.⁴

Achievements

Among Pierre Lanarès achievements, the lasting one was accomplished during his six years of religious liberty ministry. Traveling mainly in western and eastern Europe to meet government officials and scholars, he became an expert on the state of religions in the communist countries. Knowing that religious freedom should be promoted in countries where it is most challenging, Lanarès visited Russia and gave lectures on religious freedom in several countries in the Soviet Union. In May 1978, he met the religious authorities of the Muslim University of Al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt. The same year AIDLR received the UN NGO Consultative Status by ECOSOC⁵ which opened the door of the UN assemblies and meetings and facilitated the cooperation with other NGOs. He attended the sessions of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva during the time of the discussion and vote of the major UN document on freedom of conscience and religion: "The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief." Before leaving his position, he introduced another Adventist, Dr. Gianfranco Rossi, who played a role in the adoption of "the day of rest" in the Declaration.⁶

Publishing Conscience et Liberté

As a champion of religious liberty, Lanarès was also an excellent speaker, chronicler, and author. His books were translated into several languages and re-edited.⁷ But his masterpiece was to give *Conscience et Liberté*⁸ a new life and to use it as the main tool of religious liberty promotion. Jean Nussbaum was the founder of the journal

in 1948 and was able to publish only three issues from 1948 to 1950. Lanarès published it twice a year and invited the best historians, theologians, legal scholars, philosophers, and politicians to author articles on religious liberty.⁹

The purpose of the journal was: “to show the greatness of religious freedom, to define its philosophical or theological foundations, and to present the social and legal consequences that flow from it in the context of history or current events.”¹⁰

Special issues were focused on: Anti-Semitism, Islam, Sects and Cults, Asia, Israel, the United States, and various other countries.¹¹ During Lanarès' time, *Conscience et Liberté* was translated into German, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Serbian, and English. Several thousand copies were printed of the French and German bi-annual editions. They were distributed by the Southern European and the Euro-African Division Religious Liberty departments at every level of the church organization. It was the only scholarly journal focused exclusively on religious liberty that existed at that time. Thus, it brought to the Seventh-day Adventist Church an important complement to the more popular-style religious freedom magazine *Liberty*.

Contribution

As a legal scholar trained in the best schools, Pierre Lanarès was well-equipped to lead the religious liberty ministry in Europe. He contributed to understanding the complexity of matters related to religious freedom. As pastor, administrator, international speaker, and author, he possessed an outstanding talent for making friends in high positions, while respecting their beliefs. As a believer of the Adventist interpretation of prophecy, he always put the religious liberty message in the prophetic context. His message was well received and accepted by Adventist members. Building his strategy on Jean Nussbaum's foundation, his ministry was and still is a source of inspiration for many religious liberty leaders. He was an exceptional promotor of religious freedom for all, but at the same time an outstanding ambassador of the Seventh-day Adventist Church before religious leaders, international institutions, and governments. At the end of one of his editorials in *Conscience et Liberté*, Lanarès wrote a few words that may summarize his life of dedication to religious freedom: “We must agree to be consumed ourselves to shine even modestly, as a true witness to freedom.”¹²

SOURCES

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United Nations General Assembly, Article 6, A/RES/36/55, November 25, 1981.

NOTES

1. See Richard Lehmann, "Hommage à Pierre Lanarès," *Revue Adventiste*, 1710 (April 2004), 13.
2. Pierre Lanarès, *La Liberté Religieuse dans Les Conventions Internationales et dans le Droit Public Générale* (Horvarth, Roanne, France: Editions ED, 1964).
3. Pierre Lanarès, "Pourquoi?" *Conscience et liberté, Printemps*, 1 (1971): 3.
4. On January 3, 1969, every Friday at 10:30 pm on RTL and on October 2, 1969 at 10:40 pm. The programs were presented by Jean Pierre Fasnacht.
5. The United Nations Economic and Social Council.
6. United Nations General Assembly, Article 6, A/RES/36/55, (November 25, 1981).
7. For example, Editions Vie et Santé, France published the following: *Ou Allons – Nous?* 1947; "L'Asie et le Sort du Monde, 1955; *Qui dominera le Monde?* 1959; *Mystère d'Israël*, 1975; *Les secrets de l'Amour*, 1975; *Faire Face au Désordre Mondial*, 1993.
8. *Conscience et Liberté*, Schosshaldenstrasse 17, 3006 Berne, Suisse
9. Among them was the French philosopher Jacques Ellul, who quoted several times *Conscience et liberté* in one of his books: *Les Combats de la Liberté, Ethique de la Liberté*, vol. 3, (Editions le centurion - labor et fides, Paris, 1984), 217.
10. Lanarès, "Pourquoi?" 3.

11. He was helped by his wife Edith Meyer Lanarès and his secretary Marie Ange Bouvier, who also worked as an editor.

12. Lanares, "Brûler pour Briller," *Conscience et Liberté*, 22, (1981), 4.

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