

# Pichot, Henri

## (1900–1966)

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### MARCEL PICHOT

Marcel Pichot was a missionary in the Guinea, West Africa. He is currently the pastor of the New Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church in Maryland, the United States.

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Henri Pichot served the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North Africa as an evangelist, pastor, and administrator from about 1930 to 1966.

## Family Background and Early Life

Henri Pichot was born on October 9, 1900, to Alphonse and Henriette (Orcieres) Pichot in the small village of Guiard, founded by French settlers in Algeria at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Pichot was the fifth of the six children who reached adult age. His siblings were Rose, Alphonse, Alice, Heloise, and Marcel. Alphonse Pichot, the eldest son, died from tuberculosis a few years after returning from World War I. Henri and Marcel, along with their father, managed the the family's vineyard. Rose and Heloise became schoolteachers, and Alice married a customs officer from Oujda, a border town to Morocco. The family faithfully attended the Sunday worship services in the Protestant chapel at Guiard, respectfully and joyfully fraternizing with their Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim neighbors.

## Conversion

In 1926, a Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelist, Alphonse Bard, came to Guiard and began selling *The Great Controversy* by Ellen G. White. The book stirred up great interest among the Waldensian families of Guiard, who were amazed to read the story of their ancestors. They even recognized the drawing of the chapel and the school built by Felix Neff in Dormilhouse.<sup>2</sup> Bible studies were organized by Elder Bureau, who led Henri and



Henri Pichot in retirement.

Photo courtesy of Marcel Pichot.

Alphonse Pichot (Henri's father), the mayor of the village, and several other local villagers to Jesus. Elder Bureau convinced Henri Pichot, who was then 26 years old, to consecrate his life to the Lord and to enter the ministry.

## Education

In spite of strong family resistance, Pichot registered at the French Adventist Seminary at Collonges, Haute Savoie.<sup>3</sup> After four years in Collonges, and a summer of canvassing in the city of La Rochelle with his friend Francois Fernandez, he returned to Algeria where he started his ministry as an evangelist under the leadership of Jules Rey.<sup>4</sup>

## Ministry

On April 17, 1933, Henri Pichot and Marthe Guilhot were married in Saint-Jeures, Haute Loire, and then returned to the ministry in Algeria. While there, he worked among European settlers and the people in the city of Biskra and Touggourt in the Saharan desert.<sup>5</sup> Later, they were transferred to Tunisia. Their sons Bernard and Marcel were born there in 1934 and 1935, respectively. In Tunis, they worked with another couple, the Arnonnes, who remained their dearest lifelong friends in the ministry. From Tunisia, after a brief time in Algiers, they moved to Oran, the second largest city of Algeria, where they remained three years after the birth of their twin boys, Paul and André. After their ministry in Oran, they were sent to Rabat, Morocco.

In addition to working among Europeans, Pichot coordinated the colporteur ministry, medical work, and Bible studies among the Muslims living in Berrichid. In 1943, Henri and Marthe Pichot went with Francois Lliobet, a literature evangelist from Casablanca who spoke Arabic, to visit Muslim communities, carrying out basic health treatment for the population while reminding them that according to the Qur'an and the Gospels, *sidna issa* [the Lord Jesus], was soon to come back as He had promised.<sup>6</sup>

## Administrator

The membership of the North African Union was almost essentially composed of the so-called *Pieds-noirs* (Europeans), i.e. French, Spanish, Italian, and Jewish people born and raised in French North Africa. Camp meetings and summer camps were regularly organized for the spiritual edification and Christian fellowship of the members. In 1945, a summer camp organized in Miliana, Algeria, by Paul Bernard and his wife Ruth, with the help of young pastors from the entire field gathered most of the Seventh-day Adventist youth of North Africa. Among these young pastors and campers were Elders Colomar, Esposito, Douay, Kamm, and numerous young men and women who later followed them in the ministry. That same summer, Pichot was appointed president of the North African Union Mission while simultaneously serving as the director of the Algerian Mission.<sup>7</sup>

Several years earlier, in 1933, a medical institution, Vie & Santé, had been built at Hydra, a residential area on the heights of Algiers. Hydrotherapeutic treatments were provided and the Adventist health message was promoted, but the institution never received official accreditation from the health authorities. In 1945, it was decided that a church school would be opened in the area of Vie & Santé. However, the school was of short because Pichot was called to Madagascar in 1947 as president of the Indian Ocean Union Mission.<sup>8</sup>

## Back to North Africa

In 1953, after five years of intense activity in Madagascar, the Pichot family was called back to North Africa.<sup>9</sup> Hardly one year after their arrival in Algiers, in the fall of 1954, they witnessed the beginning of the uprising of the Algerian people against France, which by 1957 escalated into a full-scale war for independence. In 1956, Tunisia and Morocco had been the first of the three Maghreb nations to become independent. As the situation worsened in Algeria, the French people, and with them many of the church members, began to leave the country. When General de Gaulle was brought back to power in France on May 13, 1958, there was a short-lived hope that the French would be able to remain in Algeria. A Seventh-day Adventist school opened in Bel Hacer, near the city of Relizane, in the region of Mostaganem, about half-way between Algiers and Oran. A correspondence course in Arabic was created by Elder Esaie Pellicer to share the Adventist message with Muslim believers. However, by that time France had already deployed an army of almost half a million men in Algeria and pacification was leading nowhere. When it became obvious that Paris intended to give the Algerian people the choice to remain with France or to become independent, a number of high-ranking officers rebelled against the government in Paris.

In the midst of the horrors of the civil war that followed, Pichot continued to systematically visit the churches and comfort the members who were fleeing Algeria for France. Most of them lost everything. Before July 2, 1962, the day Algeria became independent, most of the 2 million French people living in Algeria, and approximately 1,200 church members from North Africa, left the country.<sup>10</sup> Many were temporarily sheltered in the gymnasium of the Seminary at Collonges where Pichot visited them and encouraged them to trust in the Lord, who would not fail to take care of them.

With independence, Pichot, who remained in Algeria, saw the opportunity to start working for the Muslims. Vie & Santé, which had resumed its medical services in 1960, was modernized in order to obtain from the Algerian government accreditation as an obstetrical clinic. The idea was to attract young families and enable the church to share with them the principles of the Adventist health message. A day school was opened for young Muslims in Algiers, another in Annaba. In other areas, however, the Adventist churches were closed and their pastors, left without congregations, were relocated to France.

## Later Years

In a garage below the residence he and his wife occupied, Pichot opened the Center for Conversation and Meditation, where Muslims could stop and spend some time conversing on spiritual subjects. Having always conducted small evangelistic campaigns, he now consciously targeted Muslim audiences. Touched by the misery of the rural population, in 1965 he made a dramatic appeal to the world church on behalf of the Muslim people. That same year, only a few months before his death, he distributed clothes he received in response to this appeal.

Known in his family, among his ministerial colleagues, and the church members he frequently visited as a loving person and a powerful intercessor, Pichot was diagnosed in 1966 with cancer of the liver. His last photo shows him standing in front of the Center for Conversation and Meditation he established for the purpose of bringing Jesus Christ to the Muslims. He died in his home on March 11, 1966, and was buried in the Saint Eugene Cemetery in Algiers. On a little plaque one can read what had been his prayer and testimony from the day of his conversion in Guiard to that day he fell asleep in the Lord: *Come, Lord Jesus!*

## Contribution

During more than thirty years of service, Henri Pichot worked for the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a colporteur, evangelist, pastor, and administrator. As an evangelist and pastor, he was instrumental in reaching unreached people groups in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. As administrator, his leadership was key to the mission among Muslims, especially during the civil war in Algeria.

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### SOURCES

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### NOTES

1. Henri's mother, Henriette Orcieres, was nineteen years old when she arrived in Algeria with twenty other Waldensian families from the village of Dormilhouse. His father, Alphonse Pichot, was a mason whose Parisian parents had been expelled from France after the 1848 revolution.

Having converted to Protestantism, he was introduced to Henriette Orcieres and they were married on May 23, 1885. Soon after the birth of their first child Rose, they settled in Guiard, where Alphonse built their house as well as several others as the village population expanded.

2. The village of Domilhouse is now protected as part of the national park of Les Ervoirs at the top of the valley of Freyssiniere and can only be reached by a 45-minute hike in the mountains.
3. Afflicted with asthma from his early apprenticeship as a blacksmith, Henri dreaded the winter months in that humid alpine region of France.
4. This was probably around 1930. See L. L. Caviness, "North Africa-No. 2," *ARH*, March 21, 1931, 17; "Algerian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1931), 268.
5. See Henri Pichot, "Led to a Soul Seeking for Light," *Missions Quarterly*, First Quarter.
6. See Henri Pichot, "Our Mission Work in Morocco," *Australasian Record*, October 10, 1944.
7. Walter R. Beach, "Out of the Devastation of the War," *ARH*, November 21, 1946.
8. "Indian Ocean Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 201.
9. A new church had been built in Algiers, next to the Parc de Gallant, right at the beginning of the most prestigious street in Algiers, the Rue Michelet. A successful evangelization campaign led by Elder Charles Winandy, from Switzerland, had added new members to the already established churches, while at the same time the work was steadily progressing in many smaller centers.
10. O. A. Blake, "Southern European Division Annual Council," *ARH*, February 7, 1963.

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