BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

His Eminence Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger
Emeritus Archbishop of Paris

Aron Lustiger was born in Paris in 1926. His parents were Jewish small shopkeepers and had come from Poland. He went to good French state schools but received no religious education. As a boy, he secretly read a bible and became aware of the continuity between the Old and New Testaments, while linguistic visits to Germany allowed him to discover the Nazi regime’s hostility to both Christianity and Judaism.

During World War II, his parents reluctantly allowed him to be baptized as he asked, thinking this might save him (and his younger sister) from deportation. It was then that young Aron added the Christian first names of Jean and Marie to his given first name. His father managed to hide in Southern France, but his mother, who had stayed in Paris to look after the family shop, was denounced by neighbours and arrested, and eventually died at Auschwitz. After graduating from high school, Aron-Jean-Marie had to go underground. He joined his father and worked in a factory and participated in Christian resistance movements.

After the war, he studied the humanities at the Sorbonne and was one of the co-founders of both the Catholic Chaplaincy there and the new National Students’ Union. He entered seminary in 1948 and was ordained in 1954. He first served as Assistant Chaplain at the Sorbonne, and in 1959 became General Chaplain of Paris Universities, leading thousands of students (and professors) on pilgrimages to Chartres or the Holy Land.

In 1969, he was appointed Pastor of the St. Jeanne de Chantal parish in Paris. Ten years later, in 1979, he was made Bishop of Orléans (the city where he had been baptized in 1940), where he immediately opened a seminary. Fifteen months later, however, he was sent back to Paris as Archbishop. He was created a Cardinal in 1983, and elected to the Académie française in 1995.

He created the Paris Seminary, which quickly allowed him to ordain on average fifteen young priests every year, or 15% of the French total, with less than 2% of the French population in his Archdiocese. He also opened a Cathedral School (now erected as a canonical School of Theology) to lay people, built new churches and established new parishes.
He has participated in all World Youth Days since their creation, and launched a series of European Youth Weeks in cooperation with the Cardinals-Archbishops of Brussels, Vienna, Lisbon and Budapest. Under his leadership, World Youth Paris in 1997 was a spectacular achievement, with over a million participants in the final Mass, and recently Paris All Saints 2004 gathered tens of thousands of young people from all over Europe for a successful week of seminars, meetings and celebrations.

Cardinal Lustiger has been a regular and influential guest in the French media for more than twenty years. He has published some twenty books, several of which have been translated in English (e.g. *Dare to Live* and *Dare to Believe*, Crossroads; *Dare to Rejoice* and *The Lord’s Prayer*, Our Sunday Visitor; *The Mass*, HarperCollins; *Choosing God, Chosen by God*, Ignatius Press). He has frequently visited the US, often invited by Jewish groups to lecture on Christian-Jewish relationships, as well as most European countries (where his books – some of which deal with the Christian roots of the continent’s identity – have also been translated), Australia, and many African French-speaking areas.

Pope John Paul II finally accepted his resignation in early 2005, and appointed to succeed him Archbishop André Vingt-Trois of Tours, who had been Fr. Lustiger’s assistant pastor at St. Jeanne de Chantal in the 1970s, then one of his Auxiliary Bishops in the late 1980s-early 1990s. Cardinal Lustiger took part in the Conclave that elected Pope Benedict XVI, and now lives at the retirement house for priests of the Archdiocese of Paris.

He was diagnosed with both lung and bone cancer at the end of 2006, and admitted to the Archdiocese’s Jeanne-Garnier Medical House in May 2007.

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