

## Tribute to Professor André Vincent (1931-2023)

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Professor André Vincent, honorary member of the Belgian Society of Orthopedic Surgery and Traumatology and former President, peacefully passed away on April 6, 2023, surrounded by his family (Figure 1).

He had finally come to terms with the path imposed by illness a few weeks earlier, even if his eternal positive energy still urged him to engage personally in numerous projects. He continued support everyone with his compassionate listening and wise advice, be it children, grandchildren, former students. He never stopped to encourage to plow the paths of life and extend the furrows he himself had once opened. Perhaps did he think he had prepared and sown enough the field so that it was time for others to reap the harvest and pursue his work.

Born in Charleroi on February 18, 1931, André Vincent completed his education after the war at the Jesuit College of the Sacred Heart. He then began medical studies and graduated as a Doctor of Medicine, Surgery, and Obstetrics from UCL in 1955.

He undertook surgical training in the department of Professor Jean Morelle at the Saint-Pierre University Clinics in Leuven. In 1958, in Lyon, he was a resident in general and vascular surgery in the service of Professor Paul Santy. It was said of him that he was one of the last representatives of those great leaders who simultaneously managed the tasks of general surgery and oncology. André Vincent probably assisted him in his early open-heart surgeries and advanced interventions for blue children, techniques he had learned from Alfred Blalock in Baltimore.

Paul Santy also gave André Vincent the opportunity to visit the service of Professor Albert Trillat, a pioneer in knee surgery and sports traumatology. Whether Albert Trillat had attended Albin Lambotte is uncertain, but like Lambotte, he was an advocate and strong supporter of the “no-touch technique,” believing that a surgery



*Figure 1. — Portrait of Prof André Vincent.*

was successful only when it ended with immaculately white gloves. This ability to learn from his own failures to foster progress surely had a lasting impact on André Vincent’s approach.

With these two early experiences and perhaps inspired by Santy’s career in the United States, he continued his training in New York at Rochester University, under Professors Robert Duthie and Louis Goldstein, in the field of spinal surgery. There, he learned scoliosis management, which became one of his preferred activities.

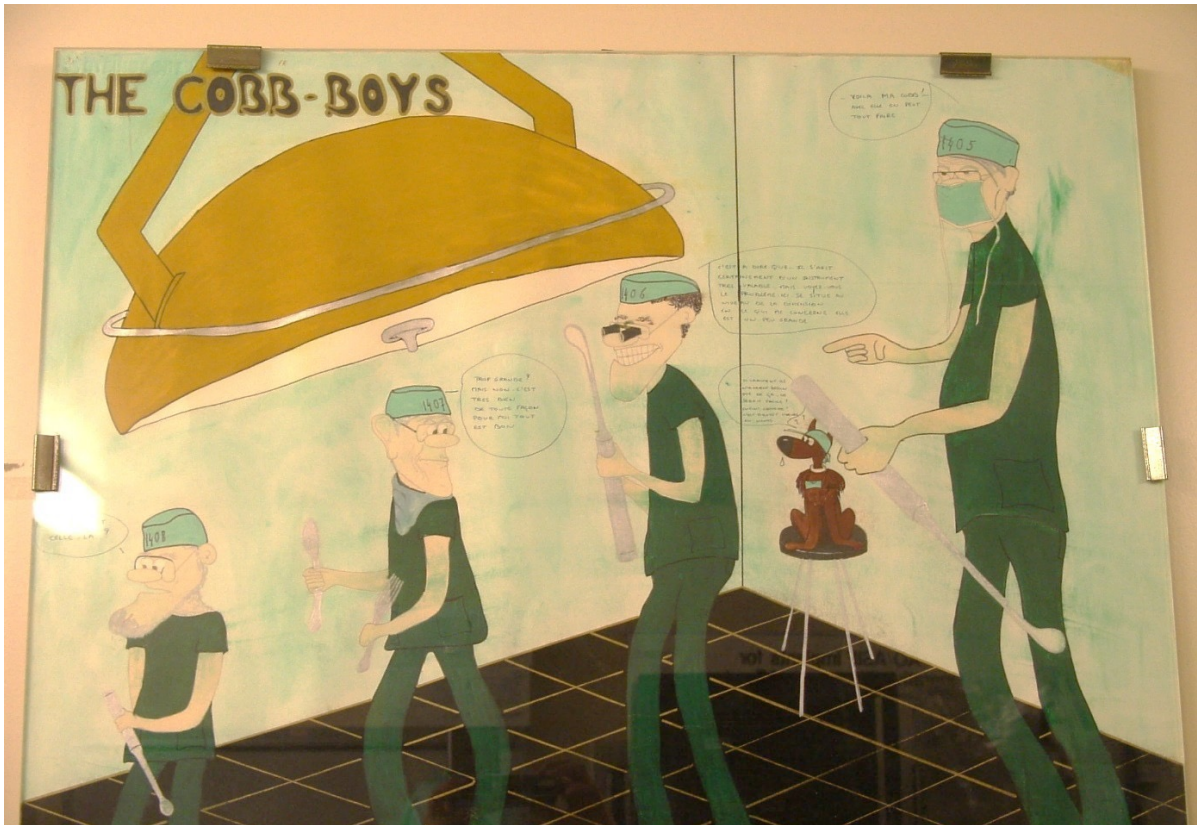


Figure 2. — *The Cobb-Boys with they preferred tools.*

Like his older brother Jacques, who became Dean of the Faculty of Lovanium in 1956, André Vincent's brilliant career led him to embrace an academic path.

He joined the surgical team at the University Clinics of Louvain, specifically in the Orthopedic service of Pierre Lacroix, established in 1954 with the creation of Belgium's first Orthopedic chair. Pierre Lacroix, trained in Smith Petersen's service in Boston, and subsequently devoted all his energy to establishing the country's first university orthopedic surgery department. He wanted the department not only to be a training ground for surgical techniques but also a place where everyone would learn and study the basics of bone biology, making them better able to understand the medical and surgical procedures they performed every day. He Therefore entrusted the anatomy chair to Antoine Dhem and the clinical activity to André Vincent.

Traumatology was a significant part of the department's activities. Plaster casting and continuous traction played a primary role. Surgical techniques were developed using Danis and Verbrugge plates for the first osteosynthesis, as well as Lambotte's external fixator. These three Belgian surgeons were pioneers not only in our country but also worldwide in improving bone fixation. Subsequently, Kuntscher's unreamed intramedullary nailing became the preferred

osteosynthesis for diaphyseal fractures. Smith Peterson's technique for treating neck fractures were also practiced.

The three operating rooms had to be shared alternately with their flamboyant colleagues from general surgery. They witnessed all interventions, from the most benign to the most serious. Even the adjacent surgery auditorium is known to have sometimes served as an emergency room for procedures such as femoral neck fractures fixed with Smith Petersen nails, or for debriding gaseous gangrene. It was in this environment that in 1959, Professor Lacroix's team performed the first hip arthroplasty for a femoral neck fracture. It was a new beginning in functional reconstructive surgery.

André Vincent surrounded himself in 1962 with Pierre De Nayer, in 1966 with Jean-Jacques Rombouts, and in 1968 with Wladyslav Lokietek. They were his first permanent collaborators and contributed significantly to the service's development, with Pierre De Nayer focusing more on traumatic sequelae and tumors and Jean-Jacques Rombouts on pediatric orthopedics and hand surgery.

Together, they formed a formidable group, wearing the same surgical uniform and readily employing the magical wand of spine surgery: Cobb's vertebral bone elevator (Figure 2). The legendary Cobb Boys worked tirelessly in the operating room: scoliosis, hip



Figure 3. — Professor André Vincent surrounded by Professors Jean-Jacques Rombouts and Christian Delloye who will succeed him at the helm of the department.

prostheses, hand and pediatric surgery, tumor surgery, and traumatic sequelae... Each excelled in their field and had their instruments tailored to their needs!

Another significant encounter for André Vincent was with Jean Lewalle. Trained at Robert Merle d'Aubigné's school at Cochin in Paris, they collaborated from 1964 in teaching assistants through weekly anatomy and surgical technique demonstration sessions. They developed hip prosthetic surgery by embracing the concept of low-friction metal-polyethylene and cemented fixation, as demonstrated by John Charnley in Manchester. This wise choice allowed them to achieve long lasting results in their patients well beyond 20 years of implant survival. Professor Merle d'Aubigné was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Catholic University of Louvain in 1982 And it was a proud moment for André Vincent.

In 1971, following Pierre Lacroix's premature death, André Vincent took over the laboratory and successfully maintained its excellence with Leopold Coutelier, and later with Christian Delloye and Evrard Munting. He successively chaired the Belgian Orthopedic Society in 1980, the presidency of the Union of European Medical Specialists in Orthopedics (UEMS) from 1987 to 1989, and the European Spine Society in 1990. From 1992, he was the national delegate of the "International Society of Orthopedic Surgery and Traumatology (SICOT)." In 1994, he was elected member of the Royal Belgian Academy of Medicine.

He had the daunting task of developing the service at a time when the specialty was becoming fully individualized, and new surgical techniques

were emerging. He built a robust team and sought out expertise to introduce new surgical techniques, ensuring that everyone had the academic background and international exposure needed.

All his students are immensely grateful to him for showing us the way and always ensuring that each of us had access to the most advanced training and could develop to the best of our abilities. Far from seeking personal glory, he humbly believed that our progresses were due solely to our own merits, even though we owed him much!

Throughout the 25 years he led the department, despite the responsibilities he bore, "the Boss" as his closest deputies called him, managed to pay attention to everyone. Regardless of their position within the structure of the academic hospital or the department, whether caregiver or patient, he offered listening ears, gestures that restored confidence, speaking truth and instilling hope. He also knew how to enjoy a good time with his residents, who never missed a chance to tease their elders! His ability to highlight everyone's contribution to the service's reputation and, above all, to patient care, while he himself took a step back, earned him boundless recognition from his patients and all his colleagues!

Granted emeritus status in 1996, he entrusted the reins to Jean-Jacques Rombouts and Christian Delloye (Figure 3).

Far from being done with medicine and surgery, he remained active in numerous scientific societies, participating in meetings of the Belgian Orthopedic Society and the spine group until 2022, where his



Figure 4. — “Age, like youth, is not a measure of time but a state of mind. It is not our duty to add years to our life, but to add life to our years. Time may wrinkle the face, but it is worry, doubt, hatred, and the loss of ideals that wrinkle the soul. Worries, not years, bend the back... At seventy-seven, as at seven, it is wonder at life that keeps us young” (Myron J Taylor).

questions, enthusiasm and curiosity about innovations and progress, as well as his sage advice, were always appreciated. Yet his gaze also turned to other horizons...

His brother Jacques’s commitment to Lovanium, the presence of African-origin assistants in the service, and the requests from former colleagues in Africa led him to share his expertise and teaching with students at the University of Bukavu. André Vincent also participated in their surgical activities. He always admired what they were able to accomplish and wrote that “their increasingly difficult working conditions demanded courage and perseverance worthy of respect.”

His ongoing commitment to the University of Bukavu, since his emeritus status, earned him an honorary doctorate in 2022. Professor André Vincent

left a lasting mark on generations of orthopedic surgeons in Belgium and abroad. Regardless of academic networks and borders, he shared his passion and, above all, his humanistic approach!

Everyone who encountered him came away with the intimate conviction that he was one of those rare men who lived simply, without futile personal ambition, while being imbued with the desire and need to do everything with the utmost honesty and rigor, simply for the greater good, without any selfishness!

The privilege of knowing him would not have been possible without the unwavering support of his wife, Bernadette. The joy and enthusiasm that filled him found no better source than her and their family.

Mr. Vincent and his wife created a home where harmony, openness to others, and an extremely welcoming table reigns, where their children, nephews, nieces, and grandchildren love to gather. Mr. Vincent took genuine pleasure in these shared moments and perhaps, finally, freed from professional activities, as a caregiver or teacher, he could devote more time to each of them, especially his grandchildren!

Perhaps finding the right balance between an exciting career and family, what could this man who had straightened so many spines confide in his grandchild if not to refer to Myron J Taylor, who wrote so eloquently that “age, like youth, is not a measure of time, but a state of mind” and that “it is wonder at life that keeps us young” (Figure 4). We are certain that André Vincent never ceased to add life to his years and never ceased to marvel!

He remains forever present in our hearts. He entrusted all of us, children, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, colleagues, and students, to continue with the same energy and unwavering determination, the furrows he had plowed, to sow and reap after him.