

VAN DORMAEL André

Born: May 4, 1915 – Oxford (GB)

Died: April 23, 1993 – Leuven

His father Jozef (1880-1944) marries Gabrielle Nys (1888-1963) in 1911 and as refugee during World War I, he works as a chemical analyst in Swindon (GB). In 1920 Jozef Van Dormael is appointed professor of analytical chemistry at the newly founded University of Agriculture in Ghent (Rijkslandbouwhogeschool).

His son André studies chemistry at the Université Catholique de Louvain and in 1938 graduates summa cum laude. The following year he takes his Ph.D. under the mentorship of Pierre Bruylants (1886-1950). After a few months of mobilization at the start of the Second World War, he is appointed head of Pierre Bruylants' laboratory of general chemistry. In 1941 he embarks on his career in the chemical industry in 1941 as chemist in the research department of N.V. Gevaert, the multinational in the matter of photographic materials, situated at Oude God, Mortsel, near Antwerp. After the death of Pierre Bruylants who was in charge of this department from 1942 till 1950, André is selected as his successor and in 1966 he becomes head of 12 laboratories. In 1972 André is appointed director of the Department of Research and Development. In 1973 he is relieved of his function and is nominated temporary director of Scientific Policies and External Relations of the CEO of R&O/Fotochemie, a function he holds till his retirement in 1980.

André Van Dormael is keenly interested how the molecular structure relates to its spectrum and reactivity. He postulates a number of rules concerning the synthesis of dyes which can be used as sensitizers. A photographic exposure can only occur when the grains of silver chloride and silver bromide are covered by a very thin layer of a compound which allows light to inject an electron in the silver compound. The traditional dyes are oxonoles and cyanines.

Van Dormael introduces a number of compounds acting as excellent sensitizers but make inferior dyes.

André is an excellent experimenter and a gripping speaker sharing his ideas with his staff. He is the author of 228 scientific publications and is credited with 82 inventions. He receives many honors. In 1947, at the age of 32 he is awarded the "de Boelpaepe" prize of the Académie Royale de Belgique. In 1947 he receives the "Ladreda" and the "Camera Official de la Industrial" prizes for his contribution to the 22nd International Congress of Chemical Industries in 1949. The following honors are bestowed on André: the "Pinkus-Chavanne" prize of the Société Chimique de Belgique (1952), the "Boudart" prize of the Federation of the Belgian Chemical Industry (1959), the medal of the Société Française de Photographie (1965), the "Adriaan-René Stevens" prize of the Vlaamse Chemische Vereniging as a reward for the many patents he has taken out (1977).

Since 1948, André is present at every international congress of industrial chemistry. He cooperates in the organization of those congresses held in Belgium in 1948, 1954 and 1958. In 1958, he becomes honorary member of the Société de Chimie Industrielle de Paris for his contribution to science and industry. He is president of section of Leuven of the Société Chimique de Belgique in 1956-1957 and becomes president of the Belgian society in 1959-1960.

André is known as a likeable academician. His knowledge, scientific insight, technical know-how, lucid judgment and strict honesty go on a par with his effort to realize a better coordination between the chemical engineer and researcher. He stands for an industry where the chemist is given a free rein to carry out research in an innovative and creative way. André's career in the

world of photography is a typical example of an organic chemist who excels in the industry. He is a strict believer that the chemist has the responsibility towards the university and towards the public to express his ideas clearly: vulgarization on a higher intellectual level should be attained. That's why André taught at the university in an easily understandable language.

After he retires André indulges in his two hobbies: he takes photographs of all the Belgian windmills and in the musical sphere specializes in the elder generation of tenors and sopranos.

On January 22, 1944 André Van Dormael marries his niece Elisabeth Van Dormael. They have three children: Patrick, Bénédicte and André.

Bibliography: the historical archives of the company N.V. Agfa-Gevaert, Mortsel (Belgium)

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