

HEROES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

1. – BROTHER MONITEUR (Maurice Martinet) (2/2)

Brother Michael Buttigieg

4. The wandering Lasallian

He started his rambling journey. He first went to Dol. His passport was duly stamped there. Because of dangers from many quarters, he wisely decided not to go any further; he stayed there for some time. He soon returned to St. Malo, where he had friends among them past students and their parents. Many of them still loved him and would probably help him. He hoped they would be faithful to him in his hour of need.

It seems that a widow, Madame du Bois, offered him shelter and food for some time. She certainly was kind to him. (8) However, shortly afterwards, we find Maurice Martinet residing at Paramé; he returned to Port Malo in early 1794. A letter written to him by his mother and found on him the night he was arrested, is revealing. It shows the anguish of heart and faith in God of both mother and son. "My dear Son", she wrote to Maurice, "I am greatly worried by the letter you wrote to me saying that you are not earning a living; this grieves me greatly. But, I realize that your friends have not forsaken you, and this comforts me". Why did he not take refuge in his mother's house, one may ask. Was it perhaps, to save her from the danger of the law if she were caught 'hiding' him? If this is correct, it more clearly shows the faith and fidelity to God of Brother Moniteur: he followed his conscience at any cost and to the very end. He could easily have taken the oath, thereby betraying his conscience, and then retire to his mother's home and affection.

He moved from Madame du Bois's house and sought a better hiding place in the farm of his friend, M. Pierre Michel, an ex-mayor whose son Brother Moniteur had taught. Pierre knew the danger; he also knew the risk he was taking; but he was a friend indeed.

The Legislative Assembly, in Paris, had on March 18 and April 23, 1793, and also before that, on August 1792, decreed that any priest (or religious) condemned to deportation found hiding anywhere would be immediately put in prison in the district concerned, and punished by death within 24 hours; any citizen collaborating in hiding him would be deported; any citizen who knew of the hiding of a priest was obliged to denounce him. "Any six individuals of the canton could accuse the 'insurmenté' of neglect of civic duty. So, the sword of Damacles hung by day and by night over the heads of Pierre Michel and Maurice.

The hiding place was discovered; Maurice was denounced. On March 8, 1794, at ten o'clock at night the farm of Grande Rivière was surrounded. Brother Moniteur by that time had gone to bed for the night. Warned by his friend, hurriedly and half dressed as he was, he climbed to the attic. But there he was discovered. A few minutes later, bound hand and foot, he was taken to prison. We have the official account of this fatal scene. The summons is worth recording: "On the 18th of Ventose (18 March), in the second year of the Republic, which is united, indivisible and imperishable, at ten o'clock at night, I, the undersigned, Pierre Gilbert, gendarme, resident of Port-Solidor, under orders from citizen Maher, in order to ensure public safety and to find out about a certain frère ignorantin, as I say, accompanied by eight soldiers of the 24th regiment, I went to the farm of citizen Pierre Michel, ..and forced him to tell us the whereabouts of the individual who was in his house and to hand him over to us. He answered that he was asleep upstairs and, that if we wanted to go up, we would find him there. We moved towards the attic, and on the steps, we met a man, unknown to us and half dressed. We asked him to come down, which he did at once. We searched him and found on him two small wallets in which there were his passport and two letters, attached herewith. We forced him to give details of himself... and he answered that his name was Maurice Martinet, formerly a Frère des Ecoles Chrétiennes of Port Malo, and that this was the second night he had spending in that house...' (9)

When, at ten at night, the troupe of 'functionaries' and soldiers, 14 in all - passed through the peaceful village of Parame, alarm soon spread...

Towards midnight lanterns were lit; in the centre of the crowd was a man suspected by all, it was "Le Frère de Port Malo", bound hand and foot like a criminal. There was no doubt about his lot: the guillotine was waiting for him. (10)

Brother Moniteur was kept in prison for a few days in the tower of Tours Solidor. Then he was moved to Port Malo prison. He stayed there six and half months. His friend Michel, after spending five months in prison, was set free. As for Maurice Martinet, the authorities seemed to have forgotten him, and, under the legislation of the time, it was the best thing that could have happened to a prisoner. But one day, the public prosecutor of the Criminal Court, citizen Pointel, was informed about this prisoner.

Brother Moniteur appeared before the "Jacobite Magistrate," who ordered him to be taken to Rennes. He was accused of 'fanaticism'... Everyone including himself knew what that meant. On October 5, he was interrogated about his name, age, profession and about where he lived before being arrested. He answered that "his name was Maurice Martinet, formerly a Brother of the Christian Schools, that

he was 45 years old, was born in Mézières in the Department of the Ardennes; he had been a Frère of the (Brothers') house since 1787; he had left his residence at Port Malo in 1,793, and he was captured on the 18th Ventose; as had no fixed abode, he had gone to offer his services as 'an écrivain'; he had left Port Malo with a passport which when we produced for his inspection he told us was the one which had been taken from him when he was arrested, and he also added that he had "taken none of the oaths exacted by the law...."

5. Four guillotined

He calmly answered all these questions and ended by stating that he had been in the farm of M. Pierre Michel because Michel's son had been his pupil. And, also, that he was simply using the liberty of his religious conscience when he abstained from taking the oath. (11)

A young man, aged 15, whose father had been a magistrate, was present; he later emigrated to America and became the first Bishop of Vincennes, today Indianapolis in U.S.A. He wrote: "The details are rather confused in my mind, but I can still see from this perspective, the tall, thin, upright silhouette of Brother Martien (misspelt for Martinet), and I still hear his voice vainly pleading his case with his persecutors." (12)

Brother Moniteur was sent back to prison. One night more to live. "Heaven opened to receive him". For 25 years Brother Moniteur had sanctified himself; he followed the Brothers' Rule and the duties of religious life faithfully and to the end (13)- the following day, October 6, a cart, guarded by eight soldiers, took him and three other priests to the Champs de Mars. The 'patriots', (mob) were singing the "Carmagnole". The martyrs continued praying taking no notice of the delirium of the populace. When they reached the place of the execution, the shackles around their feet were taken off; they were handed over to some servants who shaved their heads, the priests gave a last absolution to one another. As they went up the steps of the scaffold, Fr. Cortois, one of the victims, sang a plaintive hymn about his happiness at shedding his blood for Christ.

Three times the guillotine fell and the executioner held up the blood covered heads of the victims to the mob, some of whom applauded and shouted 'Vive La République!' It was then the turn of Brother Moniteur. "He breathed his last, pronouncing the name of 'Jesus', for whom he sacrificed his life. (14)

The "avenger" of the people took by the hair that head, which was now the head of a martyr for Christ, and went

round the platform, whilst the mob roared "Long live the Nation!" A cart took the bodies of the four martyrs and threw them into the public grave, where they were covered with lime.

POST SCRIPT.

For many years, a great many people had hoped that these martyrs, like those of Paris and the September Martyrs, including Blessed Solomon, and the three Lasallians of La Rochelle, (Léon, Roger & Uldaric, of whom we hope to write later) would be beatified. For a good many years the French Government had objected.

It is sad to have to report, however, that according to a recent note received by the author of this article from the bishopric of Rennes: "it seems that the cause of the martyrs, guillotined on October 6, 1794, has made no progress." (15)

Cannot the Institute do something about this matter? In fact is it not the Institute's duty to intervene? Is it right for us to leave the witness of this guillotined Lasallian Hero and Martyr unremembered and unhonoured? Is it not our duty to take up the cause of his beatification?

Brother Luigi Morelli, our Postulator, has assured the writer of this article, that he is himself taking up this cause. 1994 being the Second Centenary of Brother Moniteur's martyrdom is surely an excellent occasion for this.

NOTES & REFERENCES

(8) Fr. Gustave op.cit. p.189

(9) *Bulletin*.... op.cit. 1910. p.18.19

(10) Fr. Gustave op.cit. p.193

(11) See also A. Ravelet, Eng. Ed. 1888 p.478.

(12) Memoirs of the Right Rev. Simon Gabriel Bruté-de Remur, Bishop of Vincennes. His book was translated into French and published in 1860 in *Revue de Bretagne et de Vendée*. Rigault op.cit. Vol III. foot note p.324:

"There was at Rennes a Brother Martien (sic for Martinet), who replied proudly to his judges: "I direct a free school. If your protestations of love for the people are sincere, if your principles of fraternity are not a vain and hypocritical formula, my functions justify me, and, far from being imputed to me as a crime, they give me a sacred claim to your gratitude." In answer to this he was executed." (A Ravelet, English Edition p.478-1888).

(13) Fr. Gustave op.cit. p 197

(14) *ibid*. p 198

(15) Letter to the author of this article by M. Jean Ménard from the Archevêché de Rennes. May 19. 1992.