

## HEROES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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

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France, the cradle of our Institute, has recently celebrated the second centenary of its Revolution. The Church, in France rightly refrained from **celebrating**, but declared its intention only to "**commemorate**" this event: a chaotic period of bloodshed and countless innocent victims (1) and this for the sake of 'Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!'. Three beautiful words indeed, pregnant with deep meaning and far reaching implications, really evangelical in inspiration, if the inspiration is drawn from/and implemented by Gospel values! "O, liberté," que de crimes sont commis en ton nom!" ironically remarked Madame Roland, on her way to the scaffold to be beheaded at the guillotine. (2) "In the street of Montmartre, the blood flowed down the gutters like water after several days of rain." "I saw bodies dragged off, feet first, along the gutters ... I ran away from the street with many others who seemed equally filled with horror". (3)

### THE BLESSED SEPTEMBER MARTYRS

On September 2, 1792, in Paris at the Carmes, a prayerful Convent suddenly became a gloomy prison and the scene of unwarranted and pitiless massacre by the revolutionary mob. There were two Lasallians among the victims: Brother Solomon LeClercq, the Secretary General of the Institute, and Brother Abraham. The first was martyred together with an Arch-

bishop, Bishops, priests and religious. The other a young religious, 38 years old, and in poor health, was fortunate enough to be helped to make his escape the day after the massacre. He lived the rest of his years, mentally disturbed from what he had witnessed and with his mind haunted by the horrors. He died insane. "He did not share the death nor the triumph of his confrères" (4)

Brother Solomon and his Compatriots, 91 in all, were declared Blessed by the Church in 1926. They are well known. Not so, probably, the other Martyrs. To revive their memory, i.e. that of Brothers Moniteur of Rennes, Léon, Roger and Uldaric of La Rochelle, LASALLIANA intends to give a short account of them in the following numbers. First, Brother Moniteur.

### BROTHER MONITEUR, THE ONLY LASALLIAN TO BE GUILLOTINED

#### 1. His apostolate.

Maurice Martinet, Brother Moniteur, was born in Mezières, France, - the 'chef-lieu' of the "**Department**". His father, Guillaume, and his mother, Jeanne, had their child baptised on the very day God gave them their son. They called him Maurice. It was April 27, 1754. His family was a "modest one" from the old city bordering the Meuse; the father was a master butcher"; he died in 1758; the widowed mother had a big family to look after, - 3 boys and 5 girls.

Maurice went to school, probably, the Brothers' school, opened in that town in 1733. And it was in this 'christian school' that probably, the seed of religious life and the wish to follow it were sown in his heart. He was 22 when, on November 15, 1772, he joined the Novitiate of Maréville, near Nancy. He made his consecration to God for life by religious profession, on September 20, 1778. Little is known of what he did and where he taught after his religious and pedagogical training. Most of the documents were lost in the fire that, in 1794, destroyed a large part of the administrative house at Maréville. However, we know from other sources, that in 1787, he joined the Community of St. Malo; Brother Auguste was Director and Brother Luc his other companion.

The fires of the Revolution burst into flame in Marseilles, and in Paris, in 1789, and reached Rennes two years later.

The parents of children in the Brothers' school had always been very happy with their sons' progress and education: religious and academic. The municipal authorities held the Brothers in great esteem; they publicly acknowledged the Brothers' work, in spite of, or because of the vexations and complaints brought against them by the *maîtres écrivains*. The Municipality wrote, *inter alia*: "The 'Frères' are men submitted to an austere discipline; their way of life has never to now deserved the slightest blame.... It would be very difficult to find men, who, from this point of view, can match them in quality...." And, remarks Brother Gustave-Marie (5), "the administration of St. Malo could also have added, that they could not find adequate teachers for the modest salary, 778 livres, meted out to the three Brothers."

On July 3, 1792, the Municipality of Rennes was forced by Paris to take action: the Brothers were asked to state their attitude towards the oath of fidelity to the Constitution of the Revolution. This "serment" went against their conscience. Brother Agathon had instructed them: "Spare yourselves the sting of conscience, at the moment of death, of having neglected these means of salvation.... Let every one of you be a model for his confrères.... everybody has his eye on you: the good to find strength, by your good example: the bad, to find pretexts (for their weakness) by your 'relachement'" (6)

## 2. Praise and punishment

The Brothers were forced to take a decision: they had to show quite clearly their resolve. They did so unambiguously and unanimously; they bravely signed their statement suspecting what might be the consequences. "Your relations with us, Gentlemen," wrote the three Lasallians "have been, at all times, a flattering acknowledgement of our continued endeavours to deserve the confidence you have in our work... We would redouble our efforts, if it were possible, as well as our zeal and efficiency in our duties, in order to continue enjoying your kindness and appreciation.... but.... we nevertheless declare, that we are firm in our resolve not to undertake any duties nor to accept any tasks than those we have promised at the foot of the altar, when we vowed to God to procure His glory, and the good of the public, as far as it was possible for us. Our intentions are as above as we have the honour to sign ourselves very respectfully yours... (Sgd. Br. Auguste, **Directeur** de l'Ecole Xe; Br. Moniteur (a **professed Brother**) and Br. Luc (a **professed Brother**). It was dated July 6, 1792.

This brave declaration was a real act of faith in God, and an unambiguous affirmation of fidelity, in association, to the Institute; it meant, to the three Lasallians, their immediate dispersion and the beginning of a 'life

of humiliation and hardship; to Brother Moniteur, it meant death by the guillotine. On September 29, 1792, the General Council of the Saint Malo Commune accused the Lasallians of "neglect of civic duty and collusion with the internal enemies of the Republic". The authorities forced them not to wear 'religious clothes'; they deprived them of the pension granted to other elderly citizens, even religious; they were prevented from giving any private lessons to earn a living, either in a private home or in school: they became "suspected persons" since they were "insementés" (persons refusing the oath); the Brothers' Community furniture and belongings were confiscated.... and they had to leave the Commune's boundaries within 48 hours. "O liberté....."

## 3. No private lessons

In vain did Brother Auguste, Director, plead, several times, to allow the Brothers to teach in some form or other so as to earn a little for their livelihood. Brother Moniteur started roaming around in a life of uncertainty and full of dangers; but he, like de La Salle, trusted in God's providence and the few friends brave enough to take risks. So, the former teacher had to exchange his talents, had to stretch out his hand to beg and to live on charity.

A Passport was given to him with orders to quit the place at once: "LAISSER PASSER Maurice Martinet, travelling to towns in the interior regions of the Republic; he is a teacher by profession; his height is 5ft. 3inches (5 pieds 3 pouces); he has black hair and eyebrows, a long nose; medium sized mouth, low forehead, and a thin face". (7)

## NOTES & REFERENCES

- (1) "numbering 1200 at least, and amongst them was Brother Solomon" - Battersby, *The History of the Institute* Vol.1 p.130
- (2) November 8, 1793.
- (3) Battersby: Brother Solomon: *Martyr of the French Revolution*, P.159, (quoting "Gentlemen's Magazine, LXII, 854-855; 162; p.169)
- (4) Rigault G. *Histoire Générale de l'Institut...* Vol. III P. 273.
- (5) F, Gustave Marie: *Les Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes de Moulins...* P.186.
- (6) Rigault. *op.cit.* Vol.III p.361-362.
- (7) *Bulletin des Ecoles Chrétiennes* - 1910. p.14