

**BROTHER MONITOR
(Maurice Martinet)
VICTIM OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION**

Brother José Luis Herмосilla

The beatification of Brothers Uldaric, Leon and Roger on October 1, 1995, in the group of Martyrs of the Rochefort Hulks, reminds us that there were many other Brothers who suffered persecution in the defense of their faith during the same era. Some of them came to a violent death while others managed to return to their life as a Brother when the persecution finally ended.

One of these men was Brother Monitor (Moniteur) from the Saint-Malo community, who was guillotined in Rennes in 1794. Following are some reflections about his life.

1. Some biographical data on Brother Monitor.

Maurice Martinet was born in Mezières, in northeast France on April 26, 1750.

He entered the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools at the Maréville Novitiate (1), where the Scholasticate was also located, and where blessed Brother Solomon was stationed for a time. Brother Solomon suffered martyrdom in 1792 (2).

In 1787 Brother Monitor was assigned to Saint-Malo (3). Three Brothers were in charge of the school there, Brother Auguste, the Director, Brother Monitor and Brother Luke. There were nearly 300 students. It was precisely this school that attracted the furious diatribes of La Chalotais in the Parlement of Brittany because, in their judgment, they were “teaching too much” in that school. They taught the children of workers more than was necessary and soon the region would be without arms for the fields and sailors for the sea.

2. The persecution of the Brothers.

Along came the revolution and with it the civil Constitution of the Clergy and the laws that obliged them to swear the oath. The school teachers’ in the union, who were jealous of the way the Brothers’ school operated, lodged a complaint with the civil authorities that the Brothers were not being submissive to the law. The Saint-Malo municipality tried to avoid having the Brothers take the oath, at least for a while. But in October, 1791, the accusation was brought before the county authorities.

On July 3, 1792, the Brothers were “invited” to swear the oath in the presence of the civil authorities. They responded unanimously in writing, signed July 6, refusing to take the oath. As a consequence of their action, they had to pay the price and so on September 29, 1792, the General Council prohibited them from opening school on October 1, at the request of the “writing masters of this city”.

Since the school did not open for the new academic year, they had to look for people to take the Brothers’ places. By October 20 no one had yet been found and it wasn’t until January 5 that the Council approved one substitute by the name of Hamon.

On January 19 all the Community goods were confiscated and sold at auction. The amount of money raised was some 1305 livres and 3 sous, of which 813 livres were deducted for the cost of pending invoices. The remainder went to the municipality.

The three Brothers had to part company and seek refuge where they could. Brother Monitor chose to remain close to the school in a small town called Paramé. There he found safe-conduct to be able to freely circulate throughout the region.

While trying to earn a living and not provoke his pursuers, he spent some time in Dol, Paramé and finally in Saint-Malo. He could not stay in any one place for long without arousing suspicion.

During this time Brother Monitor received a letter from his mother, which was in response to one of his own. In the letter, she told him: "I see that you have no means of supporting yourself and this saddens me. But I am consoled by the fact the your friends have not abandoned you".

At the beginning of 1794 Brother Monitor left Paramé at the request of his sisters who also wrote him from Mezières informing him that if he stayed there he would be in great danger. He returned soon afterwards, and he found shelter in Pierre Michel's house, the father of a student that he had taught. Not 48 hours had passed when at 10:00 PM on March 8, 1794, eight policemen and six other officials surrounded the house of his benefactor. They were guided there by a man named Mahé, the commissary of Biot de Varennes. Brother Monitor was awakened, advised of the situation, scarcely had time to dress and went to hide in the hay loft. It was not long before they found him and he was arrested.

The following day he was locked up in the strong Solidor Tower which was being used as a prison and soon afterwards he was transferred to the Saint-Malo prison. Brother Monitor was there when his benefactor, Pierre Michel, was also imprisoned in the same place for having provided shelter to a "recalcitrant". For this crime, he was later exiled.

The two of them spent some six and one-half months in jail until September 30, when they were transferred to the jail in Rennes.

The court appearance could not be delayed and on October 5 they were brought before the court.

3. Condemnation and Martyrdom.

Brother Monitor's declaration before the court has been preserved (4). It is an extraordinary testimony of faith, fidelity and integrity. There is also the testimony of a young boy who managed to be present for the appearance. His name was Gabriel-Simón Bruté de Vauhello and he was the son of a lawyer from the Parlement of Brittany. Forty years after these events this boy became the bishop of Vincennes, Indiana in the United States. His written record of his memories and his own testimony is of first quality, although apparently not all the details were accurate. He recalled the bravery of Brother Monitor, his words in defense of his vocation as an educator and his admission of belonging to a Religious Institute. He told how Brother Monitor expressed his reasons before the court that the most they should condemn him for should be because of his dedication as a teacher...But the panel of judges would have none of it and he was condemned for not having taken the oath.

The following day, October 6, he received his sentence. Along with Brother Monitor three priests were executed, Fathers Jean Gortais, Barthélemy Robert and Marc Le Roux, and they were condemned by the same court shortly before Brother Monitor received his sentence and for the same reason.

They put them in a cart to take them to Beaumont field which the Revolution had named "Champ de Mai" and then "Champ de Mars". This was the first time that the punishment had been administered in that place, since before it was done at the "Place d'Armes" in Rennes. The cart overturned over several times on the way to the scaffold, amid loud laughter and insults from the public. Later, one of the executioners cut the prisoners' hair in order to facilitate the decapitation. The three priests were guillotined first and then Brother Monitor. The executioner held up the heads by their scalps and showed them to the people, who shouted and cheered.

The cause for the beatification of Brother Monitor is included in the group called "The Bretons", and it was introduced in 1938 due to the efforts of the diocese of Rennes. •

(1) Cf. Institute Bulletin, 1908, p. 65ff and 129ff which fully explains the establishment of the Brothers in Maréville.

(2) Cf. Institute Bulletin, 1908, p. 131, n. 4; 1910, pp. 7-27.

(3) Cf. Institute Bulletin, 1910, p. 2ff about the Christian School of Saint-Malo and Brother Monitor.

(4) Cf. Institute Bulletin 1910, pp. 21-27.