

**BROTHER VICTORINO  
(1885-1966)**

**Brother Alfredo Morales**

On Saturday, February 20, 1999 the Brother Visitor and the members of the District Council, while gathered together for a District Council meeting in the city of Higüey, Dominican Republic, agreed to proceed with the Process of Beatification and Canonization of one of the founding Brothers of that District: Brother Nymphas Victorin, better known as BROTHER VICTORINO.

By means of this article we would like to present to the Institute and to the Lasallian Family the most salient characteristics of the life of this servant of God, whose Cause was begun due to the persistence of the Former Students of Lasallian Schools in Cuba and the many members of the Cuban Catholic Youth Federation which was founded by him. It appears that this is the first case in which the Cause for the beatification of a Brother was begun by former students.

He was born in Onzillon, France on September 7, 1885. Onzillon is not far from the celebrated shrine of Our Lady of Puy. His home was humble but there was a deeply Christian atmosphere. He was the oldest of 7 siblings, one of whom was also a De La Salle Brother. He was baptized on the day of his birth and was given the name Augustine Arnaud.

He attended a Lasallian school near his home town on a scholarship. While a student at the school he made his First Communion and he began the vocational discernment process which resulted in his entering the Juniorate.

On October 28, 1901 he began his novitiate with the taking of the habit and assuming a new religious name. Years later, in Cuba, he would be known simply as "Brother Victorino". For the many young people who got to know him he was "Vitico".

"In 1904, with the Laws of Expulsion for the Congregation in France, the young Brothers began their exodus, destined especially for countries in the Americas. In February, 1904 I joined a group destined for Canada. That experience was also a type of exile, almost a permanent goodbye to my homeland. Our mother encouraged us to continue on in our vocation as she bid us a tearful but courageous farewell".

With those simple words in his "Memoirs" that is how he described the interior drama of his first grand gesture of fidelity to his vocation.

It seemed that Brother Victorino was to remain in Canada along with his blood brother but in February, 1905

something unexpected happened that was to change his life: A Circular arrived from the Major Superiors asking for volunteers for the new foundations in the Antilles, specifically Cuba. "I offered myself and I was accepted" he wrote years later. That is how he came to be involved in the history and with the young people of Cuba.

A founding group of 15 Brothers was formed: 11 from France and 4 from Canada. They arrived in Havana, Cuba on September 10, 1905.

"Here I am, with all the dreams of a twenty-year old, facing an unknown landscape in a new field of work" (Memoirs).

Their challenge was to lay the foundation for Lasallian ministry in Cuba and in the Caribbean amidst the enormous amount of effort required for linguistic and cultural inculturation. Brother Victorino faced all of this with what would be his proverbial smile that characterized him throughout his life.

"We put on a cheerful face when we faced poverty and discomfort" (Memoirs).

They assigned him a classroom with the youngest students in the newly founded School for Language and Commerce, which in time would become the famous De La Salle Game School in a Havana neighborhood.

On September 8, 1913, at the age of 28, he pronounced his perpetual vows on the Feast of Our Lady of Charity, the Patroness of Cuba...

The years went by: Brother Victorino delved deeper into an understanding of the human and spiritual realities and basic needs of the young people of the newly formed Republic of Cuba. Similar to the action of our father and Founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle, he searched for an answer: "impressed" by the spiritual abandonment of the former students of Catholic schools, on February 11, 1928 he gathered together delegates from 14 associations and Catholic schools and he established the FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC CUBAN YOUTH.

Internal and external misunderstandings of all types besieged the project, just as any other authentic work of God. But Brother Victorino, a man of faith and prayer, stood his ground and developed a great spiritual strength and from the beginning he stated that this was a work of the church. It was not an esoteric group nor did it show any particular preference. He enlisted Monsignor Manuel Arteaga y Betancourt, then Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Havana and later Archbishop and the first Cardinal of Cuba, as the group's first advisor. There was a close friendship between the two of them which lasted throughout their lives.

The FEDERATION grew by leaps and bounds: "federated groups" sprang up all over the country and they held weekly meetings under the theme "Piety, Studies and Action". The image of traditional Cuban Catholicism began to change in the face of the public presence of these young people which were now prepared with a keen sense of the Christian commitment of their faith. This event had happy repercussions in the field of vocation ministry: in 1961 some 75% of priestly vocations in the two major seminaries in Cuba came from the ranks of Catholic Youth and 60% of native Lasallian vocations belonged to or had had contact with the FEDERATION.

And when the Cuban Episcopal Conference decided to set

up four branches of Cuban Catholic Action groups, the Federation offered the support of its 7,000 members to set up the two youth male and female sections.

In 1938, ten years after the foundation of the FEDERATION, Brother Victorino received the title of “Councillor for Life”. It was he who composed the official hymn for the Federation and who designed its banner and shield. This shield was chosen by the Episcopal Conference to identify all Cuban Catholic Action groups.

The tremendous apostolic activity of Brother Victorino was not limited to the Federation: he also founded the Catholic University Home in Havana and the Christian Marriage teams, from which sprung the Christian Family Movement in Cuba.

“He was sent to Cuba to make it Christian from top to bottom, beginning with new wheat in order to make it solid and strong” (Testimony).

What was the secret of Brother Victorino’s prodigious apostolic fecundity? First and foremost was his communion with his Brothers, the Institute and the Church. Not even in the worst of times did he involve himself in a separate cause. But this was also the result of his life of faith, his deep sense of prayer, his humility and his dependence on the will of God. From these interior experiences he gained a surprising interior strength: he developed a heartfelt spirituality and pedagogy which was so dear to the our Founder and so he managed to touch the hearts of thousands of young people, men and women, always leaving them with a sense of peace and spiritual harmony. Therefore he was loved by everyone and that is why his memory has persisted and his former students and “federation members” have requested that the process for his beatification be begun. For wherever a Saint passes by, there are traces that remain.

“Thousands of persons and places were ‘touched’ by that loveable and simple, friendly, honest and good man; and they felt that their lives had been enriched by means of their experience and contact with Brother Victorino” (Testimony).

Cuba and the Church recognized him during life for his extraordinary efforts:

- On October 10, 1945, a national holiday, the President of the Republic awarded him with the nation’s highest honor: the Cross of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes.
- In 1950 Cardinal Arteaga designated him as the Secretary for the Cuban Pilgrimage to Rome, on the occasion of the Holy Year.
- In 1951, the Catholic University of St. Thomas of Villanova in Havana, desirous of honoring the Brothers on the occasion of the tercentenary of the birth of St. John Baptist de La Salle, chose Brother Victorino to be awarded the title of Doctor of Public Law “honoris causa”.
- In 1953, the Church awarded him her highest honor: the “Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice” medal.
- In 1955, the French Embassy in Havana awarded him with membership in the Legion of Honor.

Good Brother Victorino received all these tributes and awards with his proverbial simplicity, repeating what he had always affirmed by his actions: “I always wanted to do the work of the Church”.

Some difficult years came with the beginning of the Cu-

ban Revolution. On February 22, 1961, with sadness in his heart, Brother Victorino left Cuba forever. He headed for Canada where his Lasallian Brother was.

On July 5, 1962, he returned to the District, this time to San Juan, Puerto Rico, where he had founded a Brothers’ School.

The last phase of his life was filled with sorrow: exile, loneliness throughout the years tested his faith as well as his psychological and spiritual tranquility.

“Few would have thought how hard it was for me to leave Cuba at the age of 75 after having spent 55 years working in a country that I came to love more than my own country, having to abandon the ministries I loved, the result of many years and many sacrifices” (Memoirs).

In reality, his spirited heart never resigned itself to dying outside of Cuba. His abundant collected letters during that final period of his life gives evidence of this. He lived out his remaining years obsessed with Cuba and with the young people in the FEDERATION.

“I suffered a great deal during my life, often in silence and with a smiling face, but human resistance has its limits”.

This quote, taken from a letter written at least two years before his death, is both revealing and moving: it finally uncovers the longtime guarded secret about that perennial smile that captured so many: “I suffered a great deal...with a smiling face”. Who could have described his wonderful interior world better than he himself?

On April 16, 1966, aged almost 81, Brother Victorino died in a hospital in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He died, having been a Brother for 65 years, professed for 53 years and with 38 years of experience with his beloved Federation.

His remains are in the De La Salle Brothers’ burial vault in the Catholic cemetery of Porta Coeli in Bayamón, a burial place endowed by the Lasallian former students of Cuba.

“He was a saint. All of us who had the good fortune, the privilege of knowing him and dealing with him, will attest to that.

We owe him a debt for all the affection we received, for all the benefits that contact with him has brought to our lives.

It should be made known what Brother Victorino meant for the Church in Cuba and for the Cuban homeland.

From heaven, that man who walked deliberately, who was completely humble, will offer us that smile which was so full of kindness and which so many times brought happiness to our lives” (Testimony)

We ask for the prayers of the entire Institute and the Lasallian Family throughout the world, so that the Lord will allow this Process to be brought to a happy conclusion.

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Interested parties may obtain more information by writing to:

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