

The Martyrs of Atlas

During the night of March 27-28, 1996, seven monks of the Cistercian Monastery of Our Lady of Atlas, near the village of Tibhirine in Algeria, were abducted by Islamic fundamentalists. Their abduction was claimed by a radical faction of the GIA (*Groupe Islamique Armé*) in a communiqué dated April 18, 1996 and published on April 27. In a second communiqué, dated May 23, the GIA announced that the monks had been executed on May 21, 1996. Their remains were identified and their funeral Mass was celebrated in the Catholic Cathedral of Algiers on Sunday, June 2. They were buried in the cemetery of their monastery at Tibhirine on June 4, 1996.

The surviving members of the Atlas community have been helped by volunteers from several other Trappist monasteries in different parts of the world. Their community is now established near Midelt in Morocco.

The seven Brothers taken as hostages and then assassinated were all of French nationality. It has been decided that any future process for their official beatification will be undertaken in union with the other Christian martyrs of Algeria.

Our Brothers had received their monastic formation in different French monasteries -- Bellefontaine, Aiguebelle and Tamié, -- as the following brief biographies show:

Dom Christian de Chergé

Born on January 18, 1937, at Colmar (Haut-Rhin), he entered the monastery of Atlas on August 20, 1969, when already a priest (ordination: March 21, 1964). He made his noviciate at Aiguebelle, and his solemn profession at Atlas on October 1, 1976. He was the elected Titular Prior of Atlas since 1984. He had studied in Rome from 1972 to 1974 and was deeply involved in interreligious dialogue. His [Testament](#), written over a year before his death but only discovered afterwards, has already become a classic of modern religious literature.

Brother Luc Dochier

Born on January 31, 1914, at Bourg-le-Péage (Drome), he entered the monastery of Aiguebelle on December 7, 1941, and was the oldest member of the group. He went to Atlas in 1946, and made solemn profession there on August 15, 1949, thus spending more than 50 years in Algeria. He was a Doctor of Medicine before entering the monastery and was asked by his superiors at Tibhirine to establish a small clinic there for the sake of their neighbors. For this reason he was very well known in the whole region.

Father Christophe Lebreton

Born on October 11, 1950, at Blois (Loire et Cher), he entered the monastery of Tamié on November 1, 1974, and made solemn profession there on November 1, 1980. He went to Atlas in 1987 and was ordained priest on January 1, 1990. He was Father Master of novices and Subprior (second superior). He also is one of the first members of the generation of 1968 to give his life for the faith. A selection of his many poems and the final part of his Diary have been published posthumously.

Brother Michel Fleury

Born on May 21, 1944, at Ste Anne (Loire Atlantique), he entered the monastery of Bellefontaine on November 4, 1980. He went to Atlas in 1984 and made solemn profession there on August 28, 1986. He was community cook and gardener, noted for his simplicity and spirit of prayer.

Father Bruno Lemarchand

Born on March 1, 1930, at St Maixent (Deux-Sèvres), he entered the monastery of Bellefontaine on March 1, 1981, having been a priest since April 2, 1956. He went to Atlas in 1989 and made solemn profession there on March 21, 1990. Although Superior since 1992 of Atlas' annex house in Morocco, he was at Atlas at the time of the abduction, having gone there for the election of the Prior of Atlas, which was to have taken place on March 31, 1996.

Father Célestin Ringiard

Born on July 27, 1933, at Touvois (Loire Atlantique), he entered the monastery of Bellefontaine on July 19, 1983. He had been a priest since December 17, 1960, dedicating himself in a special way to the street apostolate. He went to Atlas in 1987 and made solemn profession there on May 1, 1989. He was the community's enthusiastic cantor.

Brother Paul Favre-Miville

Born on April 17, 1939, at Vinzier (Haute-Savoie), he worked as a plumber before entering the monastery of Tamié on August 20, 1984. He went to Atlas in 1989 and made solemn profession there on August 20, 1991. He was gifted and competent in every type of manual work.

The following links can be consulted:

- [Letter of the Abbot General](#) on the meaning of the Atlas events (May 27, 1996).
- [Second letter](#) of the Abbot General to the Order (June 11, 1996).
- [Third letter](#) of the Abbot General to the Order (October 12, 1996).
- [Fourth letter](#) of the Abbot General to the Order (dated May 21, 1997).
- [John Paul II's message](#) to the Order on the occasion of a Mass celebrated for the seven Brothers at Tre Fontane, in Rome, during the 1996 General Chapter.
- [Homily of Archbishop Tessier](#) of Algiers on the same occasion.
- ["Cistercian Martyrs of Algeria, 1996"](#) by M. Basil Pennington (article published in the final 1996 issue of *Review For Religious* and reproduced here with permission).
- [Conference by Dom Christian](#) de Chergé at the General Chapter of 1993 (two years and a half before his death).