

The Martyrs of Atlas

During the night of March 26 - 27, 1996, seven monks of the Cistercian Monastery of Our Lady of Atlas, near the village of Tibhirine in Algeria, were abducted by Islamic fundamentalists. In a communiqué, dated May 23, it was announced that the monks had been executed a few days earlier. 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 killed were all of French nationality. The 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

There is an excellent movie on the Atlas Martyrs made in 2010 called "Of Gods and Men".