

Titus Brandsma

1881-1942

**Carmelite
and
Martyr**



*"He who wants to win the world for Christ
must have the courage to come in conflict
with it."*

—Titus Brandsma

***Front Cover Photo: Painting of Fr. Titus in the Carmelite Priory
at Deventer, Holland.***

FR. TITUS BRANDSMA, O. CARM.: A BIOGRAPHY

The life of Titus Brandsma began in the quiet countryside of Friesland, Holland, where he was born on February 23, 1881, and ended some sixty years later on July 26, 1942, in the notorious hospital of the Dachau concentration camp.

Born Anno Brandsma, he completed high school studies with the Franciscans before entering the Carmelite monastery in Boxmeer in September of 1898, where he adopted his father's name, Titus, as his religious name. During the early years as a Carmelite he showed interest in journalism and writing, two activities which would occupy much of his time later on in life. Titus professed his first vows as a Carmelite in October, 1899, was ordained on June 17, 1905, and after further studies at the Roman Gregorian University, graduated on October 25, 1909 with a doctorate in philosophy.



Fr. Titus' entire priestly life was spent in education, although always with a keen pastoral sense of people's needs. He joined the faculty of the newly founded Catholic University of Nijmegen in 1923, and served as Rector Magnificus, or President, of the University in 1932-33. After this time he resumed his teaching duties, and in 1935 made a lecture tour of the Carmelite foundations in the United States.

Just before this lecture tour, Archbishop De Jong of Utrecht appointed Fr. Titus as spiritual advisor to the staff members of the more than thirty Catholic newspapers in Holland; around the same time, the policies of Adolf Hitler, the new German Chancellor, began to be felt in Holland, and were openly criticized by Titus in his teaching and in the press. With the Nazi occupation of Holland on May 10, 1940 began the open persecution of the Jews and the active resistance of the Catholic hierarchy, who announced on January 26, 1941 that the sacraments were to be refused to Catholics known to be supporters of the National-Socialist movement.

While Titus' involvement with this Catholic resistance to Nazi activity was becoming more blatant, it was the Church's refusal to print Nazi propaganda in their newspapers that sealed his fate. Titus decided to deliver personally to each Catholic editor a letter from the bishops ordering them not to comply with a new law requiring them to print official Nazi publications. He visited fourteen editors before being arrested on January 19, 1942 at the Boxmeer monastery.

Fr. Titus was interned at Scheveningen and Amersfoort in Holland before being sent to Dachau, where he arrived on June 19, 1942. His constitution quickly deteriorated under the harsh regime, forcing him to enter the camp hospital in the third week of July. There he became the subject of biological experimentation, before being killed by lethal injection on July 26, 1942.

A Family Portrait

Titus' mother in Friesian (or Friesland) dress. Picture taken about 1925. She died in 1933. Her maiden name was Tjitsje (a very Friesian name) Postma. Some thought her a conservative woman, not strong, tending to be anxious in the care of her children. Friesland is the northwest area of Holland, with a distinctive culture which Friesians are eager to keep alive. Family names tend to end in "a." Their language borders on English through Anglo-Saxon origins, and it is not readily understood by the Dutch.



Anno (future Titus) Brandsma at 15 or 16 years, before he entered the Carmelite novitiate. He was a student then in the town of Megen, Holland, at a Franciscan-run Latin school for boys considering a priestly or religious vocation, not just for those entering the Franciscans.

Portrait of Titus' father, Titus. (Young Anno took his father's name when he entered the Carmelite order). This man died in 1920. Date of photograph is unknown despite printing at base of picture. Catholics were a minority in Friesland and were defensive about their interests. Mr. Titus Brandsma took great effort to preserve the Friesian culture within his family. He took part in local politics, at one time becoming Chairman of the local election board.



Family portrait of Brandsma family, taken perhaps at Titus' ordination in 1905. From left to right: Fr. Titus, baptized Anno, second youngest in the family. Sr. Maria, a Poor Clare cloistered nun, and so, unable to be present. Her picture was later imposed on this photograph. Baptismal name was Boukje. Titus' mother, Tjitsje (Postma) Brandsma. Trees (pronounced "trace") de Boer, daughter of Titus' married sister Gatske de Boer. Sr. Willebroda, Precious Blood Sisters. Baptismal name was Siebrigje. Jan de Boer, son of Titus' sister, Gatske. Gatske de Boer, the only one of Titus' brothers and sisters to marry. Fr. Henricus Brandsma, O.F.M., youngest in the family. Sr. Barbara, a Franciscan Sister, baptized Plone. Micheil de Boer, Titus' brother-in-law. His mother's and sisters' baptismal names are Friesian and not easy for Dutch to pronounce.



The house of Fr. Titus' birth at the place called Oegeklooster, Bolsward. In the Middle Ages, there was a religious house here dedicated to St. Hugo (so "Hugocloister"). Titus' family ran a dairy farm and sold the cheese which they made in this home/factory. This area of Holland is called Friesland or Friesland. Around the world, people are familiar with Friesian Holstein dairy cattle.



The Brandsma family home. The family owned a dairy herd and sold milk and the cheese made in this home factory. The place was called Oegeklooster (convent of St. Hugo) because at one time a religious house was located there. Oegeklooster is a short distance from the town of Bolsward in Friesland, Holland, where Anno (Fr. Titus) was baptized and first attended school. The woman and child on the left are probably Gatske (de Boer), Titus' married sister, with her daughter Trees. The man and boy on the right are probably Micheil de Boer, Titus' brother-in-law, with his son, Jan. Although the man in the center seems to be an officer, the others are probably employees who worked at the cheese making. This photo was probably taken about 1900. Micheil de Boer and his family continued the farm and business until he sold it to a relative in 1932.



The gymnasium (secondary school) and friary of the Franciscans at Megen, Holland. Anno (Fr. Titus) Brandsma attended this Latin-school as an adolescent due, perhaps, to the influence of the Franciscan pastor at St. Martin parish, the church of the Brandsma's in Bolsward. Many of these students later entered various seminaries for the priesthood. Anno said he didn't join the Franciscans because they lived only one or two together while Anno wanted to live in community.



Bolsward. From Oegeklooster, the house of Fr. Titus' birth, looking down the road and across the fields. From the corner of the Brandsma farm, Oegeklooster, the house of Titus' birth, we see the town where Titus was baptized "Anno" in the parish church of St. Martin, and where he later began his first years in school.

Titus' Schooling



Titus in early days of this Carmelite novitiate at Boxmeer, Holland. Born in 1881, he entered the novitiate in 1898, at about 17 years of age. Here he is wearing the habit of the old Reform of Tournai (note the higher, firmer cowl). The Dutch Carmelite province changed from this style of habit very soon after this photo was taken.

Titus with classmates (philosophy students) and two professors in the garden at Boxmeer friary. Time: after his novitiate, and in the years 1900 to 1903. On the far right is Fr. Hubertus Driessen, O. Carm., 10 years older than Titus, and his teacher and mentor. These two, as close friends, contributed greatly to the growth of the Dutch Province of Carmelites. Hubertus later became Procurator General in the Carmelite Generalate in Rome.



Anno Brandsma entered the Carmelite Order in 1898 by beginning his novitiate year in this monastery of the Order in Boxmeer, Holland. On the near right is the old Latin school, followed by the monastery with the novitiate on the top floor, then the church with its tower re-built after the destruction of World War II. According to custom, he took a new name upon entering religion. He chose his father's name, Titus.

Titus' handwritten profession of vows as a Carmelite.



Ancient entrance (1653) to the Carmelite monastery at Boxmeer. Titus entered the Carmelite Order as a novice here in 1898 when he was about 18 years old.



Titus as a young priest. The hats indicate this was taken in Rome. The other man was a fellow student of Titus (the future Msgr.) Olaf Smit.



Titus with his philosophy professor and friend Hubertus Driessen, O.Carm. On far right is Hubertus' brother, Eugenius Driessen, O. Carm., a professor in Rome for many years. In an examination in Holland, Eugenius asked Titus to defend a thesis concerning angels, and Titus suggested proving the opposite. Eugenius was not amused and refused to recommend Titus for studies in Rome. Later on, Fr. Hubertus arranged for Titus' going to Rome for theological studies.



Titus in white cloak of Carmelite habit as a young priest and professor, probably 30 years of age.



Titus as a young priest, back from Rome, and professor at the Carmelite seminary probably at Oss, Holland (the small structure in background of left photo is at Carmelite priory at Oss). He was probably 26 to 28 years old; he seems younger in the right picture than in the left view. The rosary was part of the habit of the Dutch Carmelites through Titus' life time and into the 1950's.



Titus (on the right) with his friend and mentor, Fr. Hubertus Driessen, O.Carm., who taught in Holland and in Rome. Time of the picture was probably before 1920 since Titus seems to be about 35.



Priory of the Carmelites in Nijmegen, Holland, built by Titus when he was prior and professor there. In the background is the Carmelite parish church of St. Augustine. The priory was built between 1922 and 1930. Destroyed in World War II, it was re-built after the war, then later was sold to become housing for university students.



A crayon drawing of Titus done by a fellow Carmelite, Berthold Pluum. This portrait was done for a mission exhibition in Oss, Holland in 1922.

Church and priory of the Carmelites, Mainz. The first Carmelites came to Europe from Mount Carmel in the Holy Land in the late 1230's. They began a community in Mainz, Germany, in 1285. It was secularized in 1802, no longer to be a religious house. Fr. Titus was one of the founders who re-opened this priory in 1924.



Titus as a young professor at the newly-founded Catholic University of Holland located at Nijmegen. He helped form this university in 1923; the picture was taken probably at the opening of the university.



1923 was an important year for the Carmelites in Holland. With the opening of the lyceum (secondary school) by the Carmelites at Oldenzaal, Holland. This was the second school the Dutch Carmelites opened and the largest one. Titus is on the left; Cyprianus Verbeeck, O.Carm., one time Provincial, is in the center next to the Papal Nuncio to Holland. Others in the picture are unknown.